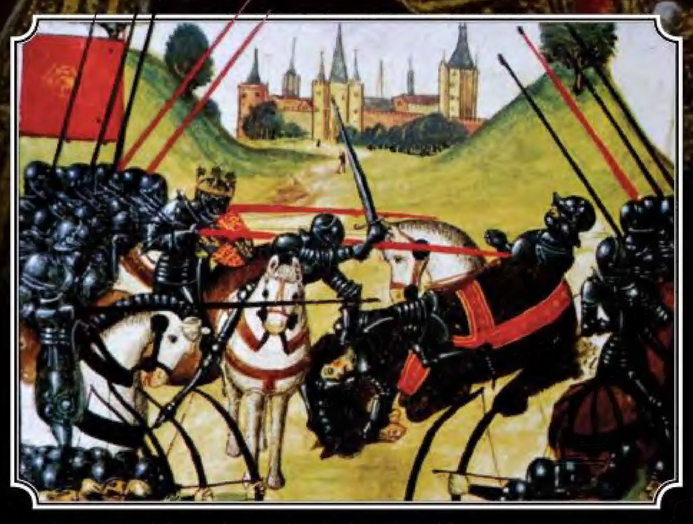
NEW

HISTORY of WAR

WARS of the ROSES

THE DYNASTIC CONFLICT THAT DIVIDED ENGLAND

RICHARD III
SAINT OR SINNER?
Inside the court of the maligned king



PLOTS & POWER ✿ YORK VS LANCASTER ✿ THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER

Digital Edition

FUTURE

SECOND EDITION

HISTORY OF WAR

WARS of the ROSES

As English troops set sail for home shores after their devastating defeat during the Hundred Years' War in 1453, few could gladly contemplate the prospect of conflict once more. Yet before the decade was out, England was engaged in a bloody civil war that reshaped the nation's ruling elite.

Incapacitated by mental illness, King Henry VI had retreated from the royal court, his power divided among his most trusted allies. In time he recovered but his advisors had experienced a taste of true power and wanted more. In May 1455, Richard, Duke of York, marched on St Albans. The first clash of the Wars of the Roses had begun.

Over the following pages, discover the key battles that shaped the course of the conflict, meet the people who sought power whatever the cost, and find out how the family feud between York and Lancaster gave rise to a new dynasty altogether…

FUTURE

WARS of the ROSES

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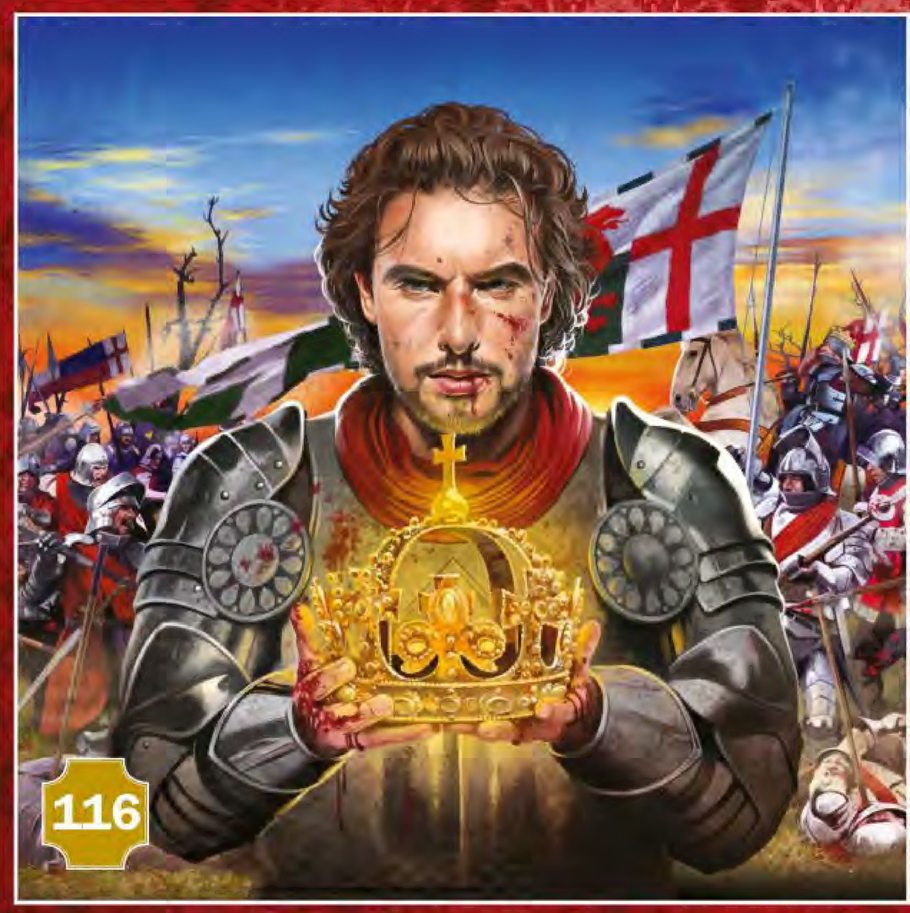

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A GATHERING STORM

THE ORIGINS OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES

How can we account for one of the most famous conflicts in English history?

Written by Jon Wright

According to one 15th-century chronicler, England was on the brink of disaster by the middle of the 1450s. The worst of the "whirlwind and tempest was still impending" but already "you might plainly perceive public and intestine broils fermenting among the princes and nobles of the realm." Nor was the "spirit of contention" limited to society's highest echelons. The "unhappy plague of division effected an entrance" in every "chapter, college, or convent" so that "brother could hardly with any degree of security admit brother into his confidence, or friend a friend."

In the years to come, the chronicler went on to lament, "The slaughter of men was immense; for besides the dukes, earls, barons, and distinguished warriors who were cruelly slain, multitudes almost innumerable of common people died of their wounds... Such was the state of the kingdom."

There was considerable exaggeration in the chronicler's ominous words, but the series of conflicts that descended upon England during the second half of the 15th century transformed the nation's future. Unsurprisingly, historians have long squabbled – and squabble still – over how such momentous events came to pass. Consensus has always proven to be elusive.

Some scholars have focused on longer-term explanations and a hefty burden of responsibility has often been placed on the shoulders of Edward III. Inaugurating the Hundred Years' War with France came at a hefty financial cost and a cash-strapped monarch was, so the theory goes, obliged to make far too many concessions to his nobility. Most damagingly, Edward

Cy commence le vᶜ. liure. Lequel contient cy soy. xlv. Chapittres
Du premier desquelz il commence a parler de la venue du treschre
toy henry dangleterre a paris ou il fut couronne a roy de
France.

Chapittre. .j.

Apres la mort de cestre noble roy henry. dangleterre vᶜ. de ce nom fut roy son filz henry. vjᶜ. Le quel en cest an de huit ans—

russa la mer et vint descendre a calais et de la il sen alla a rouen en normandie ou il seiourna vne espace de temps et puis sen alla a pontoise qui fut enbrouw a lissue du mois de nouembre Lan mil quatre cens et trente et de

The coronation of Henry VI as king of France in 1431

King Richard II of England

is said to have allowed the expansion of what historians have referred to as "bastard feudalism." An older paradigm, where allegiance was secured through the granting of land tenure, gave way to a contractual system in which people were bonded to their lords by financial means. While this was efficient for raising armies, it carried inherent risks. Nobles had access to armed bands of retainers who could wreak havoc during local disputes, allegiances (now personal rather than hereditary) could be bought and sold, and public order was constantly under threat.

The net result, it has been argued, was a structural weakening of the monarchy, which became increasingly vulnerable to the machinations of "over-mighty" subjects. Small wonder, then, that the Wars of the Roses would feature figures as influential as Richard, Duke of York, or Warwick the Kingmaker - men who now had the ability, as never before, to shape the nation's destiny.

This interpretation has come under siege. Rather than imagining an England increasingly menaced by degenerate nobles with access to armed gangs of thugs, we should concede that "bastard feudalism", if we even accept the term, worked tolerably well most of the time during both war and peace, and that stability was entirely possible. Nobles usually shared a monarch's desire for a measure of political equilibrium and, as historian KB McFarlane famously put it, "only an undermighty ruler had anything to fear from overmighty subjects."

Kingship had not been fatally wounded and, indeed, many institutions such as Parliament and the Common Law continued to function well through much of the 15th century. As McFarlane's observation suggests, however, everything depended on the character and ability of the ruling monarch, much as it always had. Events leading up to the Wars of the Roses would certainly bear this out.

At this point, 1399 comes into focus. Edward III may not have undermined the structural integrity of the English monarchy but he certainly had an unusually large number of children, whose own progeny created a dizzyingly contested dynastic landscape. In 1399, Henry Bolingbroke (Edward's grandson via John of Gaunt) usurped Richard II (Edward's grandson via Edward, the Black Prince) and became Henry IV. For those in the late Medieval and early-modern periods, this dramatic

Joan of Arc before King Charles VII during the Hundred Years' War

act was directly to blame for the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses. God was dispensing divine punishment for such a flagrant overturning of the rightful succession: an act "against God's law, man's allegiance, and oath of fidelity."

We may not subscribe to this view, but the nature of Henry's rise to power did have fateful consequences - his legal claim to the throne was less than pristine. Richard descended from Edward III's eldest son, while Henry's father was Edward's fourth son. Into the bargain, the descendants of Edward's third son, Lionel of Clarence, had considerable room for complaint. Henry attempted, rather unconvincingly, to shore up his claim by asserting his descent form Henry III through his mother but it was clear that his power rested solely on popular assent. Much of England had been rather pleased to see the back of Richard II and while this played to Henry's great advantage, the same logic dictated that if a monarch proved unpopular then his dynastic rights did not guarantee his survival. Perhaps any king was better seen as first-among-equals, to be adjudicated by an increasingly assertive nobility and a decidedly vocal populace. Once again, the talents and reputation of an individual ruler would prove to be of paramount importance.

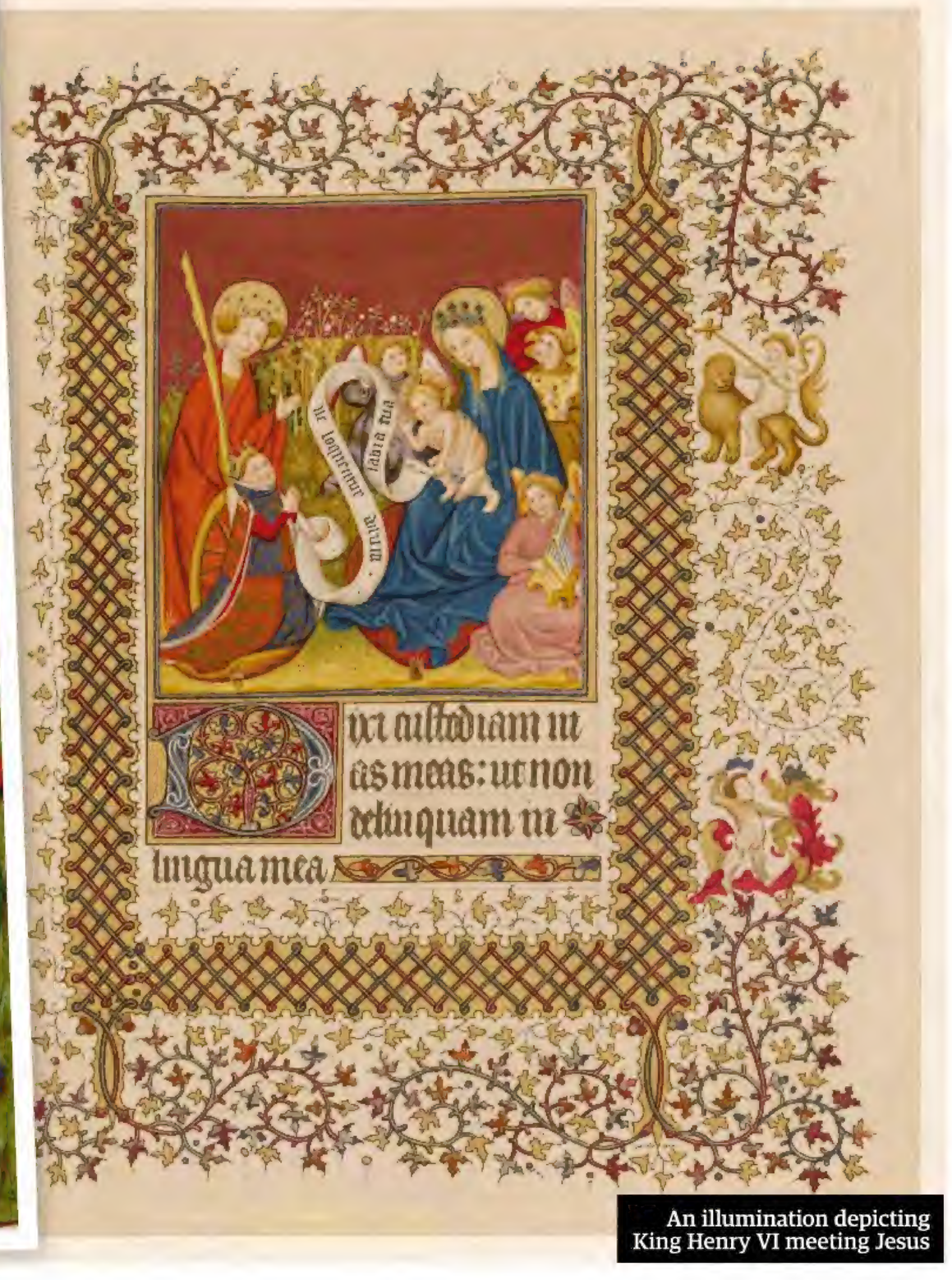
With Henry IV, we can at least applaud the fact that he managed to weather his reign and lend some legitimacy to the Lancastrian cause. In many ways, he was at risk from the outset. It was argued (not without justification) that Richard II had been a tyrannical, avaricious and arbitrary king, so Henry's case rested almost entirely on being a more palatable ruler. Promises were hastily made to limit financial exactions but political circumstances like conflict with Scotland did not make it easy to reduce tax burdens. Tellingly, Henry went through no less than six royal treasurers between 1399 and 1404.

> "Everything depended on the character and ability of the ruling monarch, much as it always had"

With the added irritant of potential rival claimants to the English throne and a swathe of disgruntled former allies of Richard II, it is hardly surprising that the nation exhibited a mounting sense of disenchantment. As early as 1401, the bishop of Lincoln observed that "joy has turned to bitterness, while evils multiply themselves everywhere". Grumbling quickly gave way to more urgent threats: the rising of Owain Glyndŵr in Wales, the machinations of Henry Hotspur and the rebellion of Archbishop Scrope, to name but a few. The potential vulnerability of the Lancastrian monarchy was not difficult to discern.

With Henry V, it is easy to assume that matters improved dramatically. He was a more dynamic king, working hard in the early part of his reign to quash disorder and restore the royal finances, and winning plaudits for attacking the Lollard heresy. Better yet, his military campaigns in France secured mighty victories like Agincourt, the conquest of Normandy between 1417 and 1419, and by 1420 he had managed to be named heir to the French king Charles VI.

The Battle of Agincourt, an English victory in the Hundred Years' War



An illumination depicting King Henry VI meeting Jesus

Look a little closer, however, and Henry's legacy contributed significantly to the woes endured by his successor, Henry VI. Even contemporaries wondered whether his adventures in France had more to do with personal ambition than sound statecraft. Would it ever be possible to secure the conquests, or had he embarked upon an ultimately unwinnable war that would place intolerable financial burdens on his successors?

Henry VI would face that very question although, naturally, he was not quite up to the task at the moment of his accession. The arrival of a nine-month old infant as king was a perilous moment for the Lancastrian dynasty but it is significant that no serious challenges were mounted or alternatives offered. The fact that Henry made it through the longest minority rule in English history demonstrates that the institution of the monarchy was not nearly as fragile as some have suggested. Unfortunately, Henry proved to be a deeply flawed, and decidedly unlucky, monarch. Many historians point to his shortcomings as the most convincing proximate cause of the Wars of the Roses.

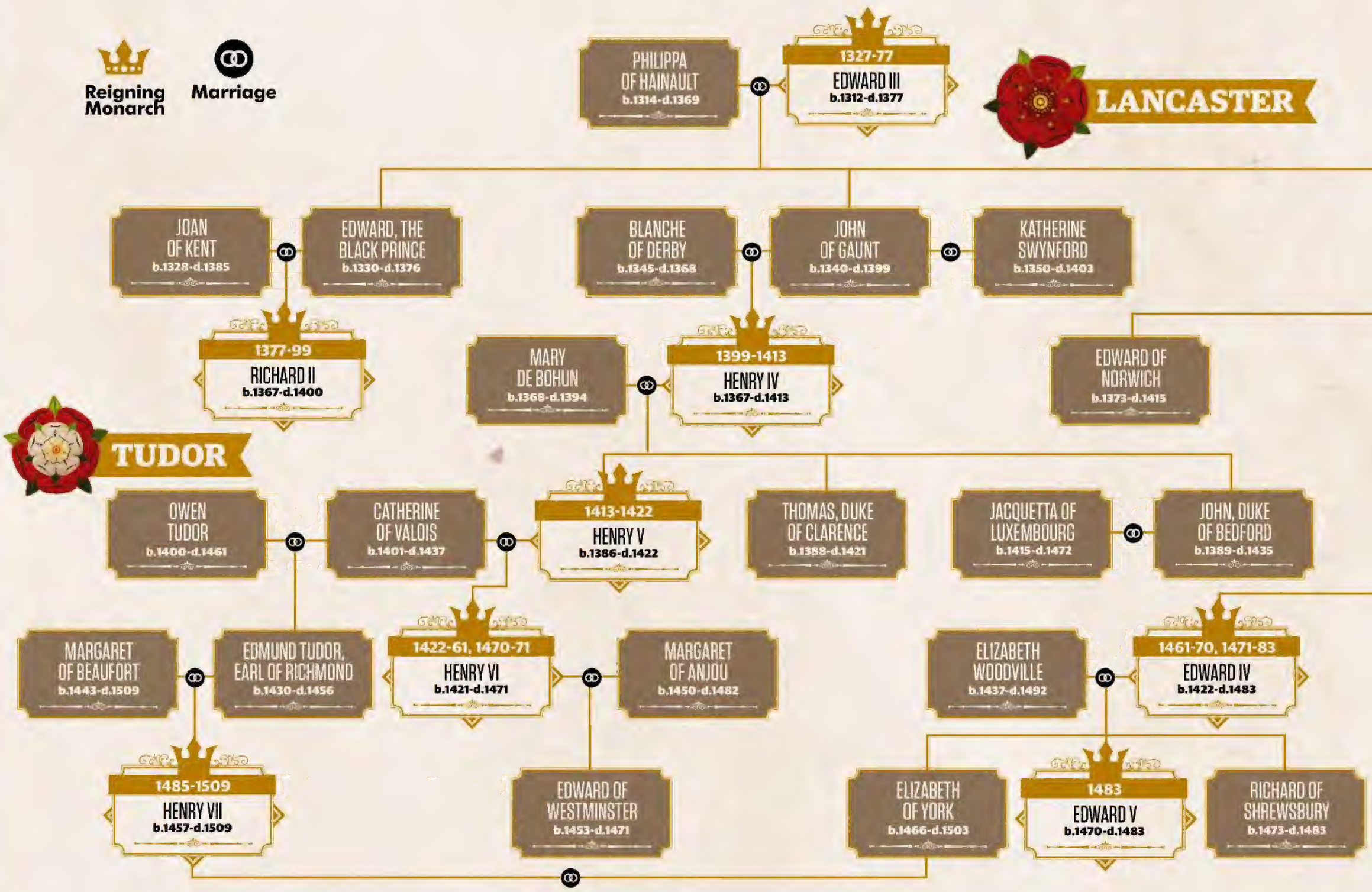
> "Over the next few years, circumstances conspired to bring England to the brink of civil war"

During Henry's minority, resentments and rivalries within the royal family (foreshadowing future events) did not help the cause of efficient governance. The king's protector, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the Duke of Bedford (like Gloucester, Henry V's brother), and the bishop of Winchester, Henry Beaufort, were routinely at odds, though irrevocable fallings-out were avoided. Meanwhile, the war in France rumbled on during the 1420s though, following the antics of Joan of Arc, the French monarchy became increasingly assertive. Charles VII was crowned king and, by 1435, France had entered into a compact with England's former Burgundian allies. This would prove a major turning point in the long and winding conflict.

It was at this stage that Henry began to play a meaningful role in English politics, attending his first council meetings, in a more than ceremonial role, in late 1435. His era of personal power had peaks and troughs. He patently lacked the martial flair of his father and never came close to leading an army in France – a country he never visited after 1432. On the domestic front he appears to have veered between inactivity and intervention and while he should not be dismissed as a puppet,

The Lancastrian and Yorkist family tree

How the two great Houses became more and more intertwined over time



he allowed the growth of unhealthy factionalism among his counsellors. Much was made of a self-serving clique surrounding the king and, while this case can be overstated, there was inherent danger in promoting men who were motivated by personal allegiance rather than deep-seated commitment to the Lancastrian cause.

For all that, consensus over the need to sustain a peaceable realm endured and the 1440s witnessed some successful attempts to dampen down local feuds within the nobility. Contrariwise, ludicrously misguided manoeuvres were sometimes made, such as granting the stewardship of Cornwall to Lord Bonville in 1438, and then offering the very same position to Bonville's rival, the Earl of Devon, four years later. This was hardly the way to contain local tensions. On one front, however, Henry's rule proved to be truly disastrous.

Henry VI featured on a groat from his reign

Fighting the French was an expensive business and financial woes were only exacerbated by his penchant for showering his court supporters with gifts and favours, and his need to secure allegiances in the shires. Between 1444 and 1449, the expenditure of the royal household rocketed from £8,000 to £27,000 per year.

Even before Henry took the reins of power, the monarchy's finances were in a parlous state. In 1433, a royal debt of £160,000 had to be sustained on an annual income of just £60,000. Parliamentary support also declined and in the entire period between 1437 and 1453, only £240,000 was granted in taxes: this at a time when many of the king's sources of private credit had been exhausted. Broader economic woes – poor levels of agricultural and mercantile output, interruptions to the cloth trade courtesy of the conflict with France – did not help the cause and by 1449, Henry was in a staggering amount of debt: £372,000. By the early 1450s, the royal income had shrunk to just £40,000 per year – just a mere third of what Richard II had managed to rake in during the 1390s. It all added up to an ideal way of undermining the security and stability of the monarchy.

All was far from lost by 1450, of course, but over the next few years, circumstances conspired to bring England to the brink of civil war. As we have seen, the long conflict with France had taken a huge toll on the nation's finances, but the end of the Hundred Years' War had an equally devastating impact. During the mid-1440s, Henry VI had sought a peaceful resolution (an effort that resulted, among other things, in his marriage to Margaret of Anjou), but hostilities resumed in 1449.

The various dynastic and familial conflicts that played a role in the Wars of the Roses can sometimes seem mind-bogglingly complex. Clarity can, however, be found by following the various lineages down from Edward III. All the chief contenders, and how they related to each other, can readily be located. The three Lancastrian Henries (IV, V and VI) can be traced back to Edward's fourth-born son, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster. Richard, Duke of York, the father of the Yorkist ruler Edward IV, was the great-grandson of Edward III. Edward IV's son, Edward V, was never crowned and Richard III, the final Yorkist king, was Edward IV's brother.

Edward III, whose descendants were at the heart of the Wars of the Roses

Henry Arthur Payne's plucking of the roses, as depicted on the walls of Wesminster

The rose in bloom

Why do we refer to the 'Wars of the Roses'?

We are accustomed to referring to the internecine conflicts of the 15th century as the Wars of the Roses, but the phrase is of relatively recent vintage – it never passed the lips of contemporaries. In tracing the phrase's origins, mention is often made of Walter Scott who, in *Anne of Geierstein*, wrote of "the civil discords so dreadfully prosecuted in the wars of the white and red roses."

Similar coinages had, in fact, appeared earlier as one 17th-century tract mentioned the "quarrel of the warring roses". More importantly, the phrase would at least have made sense to those living at the end of the 15th century. The Yorkists deployed the white rose, a symbol throughout the period and, while Lancastrian use of the red rose is harder to locate before the Tudor era, it was well established during the reign of Henry VII. Tellingly, one chronicler, writing shortly after Henry's victory at Bosworth, recorded how "the tusks of the boar" – by which he meant Richard III – "were blunted and the red rose, the avenger of the white, shines upon us."

The Tudors rested their reputation on having brought the wars to an end and restoring peace to the nation – an achievement symbolised by Henry VII's marriage to Elizabeth of York and the combined white and red roses in the famous Tudor emblem. By Shakespeare's time, the notion of the competing roses was firmly secure and in *Henry IV Part I*, supporters of the rival dukes of Somerset and York are to be found gathering white and red roses to indicate their respective allegiances. The phrase 'Wars of the Roses' should, therefore, be regarded as a historical construct and it tends to disguise the fact that the conflict was divided into three separate and very different phases. Nonetheless, it trumps alternatives such as the rather misleading 'Cousins' War'.

The following year, Normandy was lost and the final blow arrived in 1453 with the loss of Gascony. The impact on English morale was massive, and of far more significance than the return of disheartened troops in search of mischief. Well before 1453, however, it was clear that the French cause was in jeopardy. In combination with the loss of Normandy, England's economic woes and growing criticism of the advisers surrounding the king resulted in a widespread mood of popular discontent.

Nothing captures this quite as well as the rebellion of Jack Cade and his comrades from the southeast who marched on London in 1450. A glance at their list of grievances is telling. Not wanting to be accused of treason, the rebels carefully directed their anger towards the king's evil counsellors: the "insatiable, covetous, malicious persons that daily and nightly are about his highness, and daily inform him that good is evil and evil is good." It was high time for the king to realise that "his false council has lost his law... the common people is destroyed, the sea is lost, France is lost, the king himself is so set that he may not pay for his meat and drink, and he owes more than ever any king of England ought."

The rebellion petered out but its motivations ran deeper. William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, and regarded by many as the most dangerous of Henry's counsellors, was impeached by Parliament, banished and murdered on his way out of the realm. In the same year, 1450, Richard, Duke of York, returned unbidden from Ireland and quickly became the focus of those who criticised the existing regime: indeed, he was explicitly mentioned by Cade and his followers. Henry did not trust York and, over the next three years, an uneasy relationship developed that almost collapsed into direct conflict. Matters always managed to resolve themselves but it was clear that York's manoeuvring, not least his mounting rivalry with Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, over influence at court, had the potential to disrupt politics on a national scale.

Perhaps all that was required to push England into a period of open civil strife and discord was just one more trigger – one more short-term cause to add to the legacy of tensions and animosities that had already built. It finally arrived in 1453 when Henry VI succumbed to a devastating and debilitating illness.

The coronation of Henry IV on 13 October 1399

Henry IV, whose early reign was brimful of perils and indications of troubles to come

© Getty Images, Top Foto

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

England's Game of Thrones

Follow our comprehensive timeline of the key events that decided the outcome of the Wars of the Roses

Henry VI is born
The son of warrior king Henry V and Catherine de Valois, Henry VI was crowned king of both England and France during infancy. He would proceed to oversee England's final losses in the Hundred Years' War and famously married the strong and powerful Margaret of Anjou.
6 December 1421

The birth of the Kingmaker
Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick was one of the most powerful figures in the entire war, personally overseeing the deposition of two kings is born. He was killed at the Battle of Barnet.
22 November 1428

Margaret of Anjou is born
One of the key players in the Wars of the Roses, Margaret of Anjou, the future wife of King Henry VI, is born in France to René, Duke of Anjou, and Isabel de Lorraine.
23 March 1430

Jasper Tudor is born
Son of legendary Welsh warrior Owen Tudor, who fought alongside Henry V at Agincourt, he would become a commander and play an important role in establishing Henry Tudor as king.
1431

Battle of Losecoat Field
Edward IV raises a new army and attacks Lancastrian troops at Empingham, winning well.
12 March 1470

The Battle of Edgecote Moor
After raising an army to put down an uprising in Yorkshire, King Edward IV's forces are intercepted by a Lancastrian one and defeated by Robin of Redesdale.
26 July 1469

Elizabeth of York is born
Elizabeth Woodville and Edward IV's only daughter to be born, Elizabeth of York, would proceed to be queen consort of England under Henry VII. She is the Yorkist partner in the eventual joining of Houses at the end of the Wars of the Roses.
11 February 1466

Battle of Barnet
The final curtain for the Kingmaker, Barnet sees Warwick die at the hand of Yorkist forces of Edward IV.
14 April 1471

Henry VI is restored to the throne
After being alienated and shunned by his old ally Edward IV, the earl of Warwick strikes a deal with Margaret of Anjou to defeat the Yorkist king. The Kingmaker restores Henry VI to the throne.
30 October 1470

Battle of Hexham
The final battle of the experienced Lancastrian commander, the duke of Somerset, Hexham saw a large Yorkist victory and Somerset's capture and execution.
15 May 1464

Henry VI dies
After a period of incarceration in the Tower of London, it is reported that Henry VI has died. Edward VI is suspected to have ordered his death mere hours before he himself was re-crowned as king.
21 May 1471

Battle of Tewkesbury
Notable for the death of Margaret of Anjou's only son, Edward, and her own capture.
4 May 1471

Edward IV dies at 40
After over a decade of successful rule as the king of England in two spells, Edward IV dies suddenly and unexpectedly, throwing the country back into political turmoil. His heir, Edward V, is only 12 years old at the time of his father's death.
9 April 1483

Margaret of Anjou is defeated
After spending most of her life caring for her son in an attempt to ensure his succession to the throne of England, his death at the Battle of Tewkesbury is the final blow to the once-powerful queen. With her spirit broken she is exiled back to France, where she spends the remainder of her life living as nothing more than a poor relation of the French king.
1475

The princes in the Tower
The only two sons alive at the time of their father's death Edward IV, Edward V and Richard of Shrewsbury are incarcerated in the Tower of London during their youth and then mysteriously disappear, likely killed to remove any possibility of them taking the throne. Who ordered the deaths is not known.
1483

Future Yorkist king of England
The future Edward IV is the first son of Richard Plantagenet and Cicely Neville. Following his father's death at the Battle of Wakefield, Edward would famously join forces with his father's old ally, the earl of Warwick ('the Kingmaker') and take the crown for himself in bloody warfare. He marries Elizabeth Woodville.
28 April 1442

York is Lord Protector
After Henry VI's first mental breakdown, Richard of York returns to London and is named Lord Protector. York imprisons the duke of Somerset in the Tower of London and forges his legendary warring relationship with Margaret of Anjou.
27 March 1453

Margaret takes back power
Following Henry VI's miraculous Christmas Day recovery from his madness, his wife wastes no time in reinstating the king as the court's top power and pushes Richard out of the capital.
February 1455

Warwick becomes captain of Calais
Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, becomes the captain of Calais, a powerful financial and military position that leads him into his apex of power, heavily controlling the affairs not just of England but of parts of France, too.
1455

Margaret Beaufort is born
The future mother of King Henry VII is born at Bletsoe Castle, Bedfordshire, England. She would become the influential matriarch that sees the rise and establishment of the Tudor dynasty.
31 May 1443

Richard marches on London
Disaffected with a list of grievances, Richard of York marches to London from Ireland, demanding Edmund Beaufort, the duke of Somerset, to be removed from office due to perceived failures. He is not supported at court, however, and leaves a year later empty-handed.
1452

The French defeat the English at Castillon
Following the disastrous Battle of Castillon, where French forces bring down the Hundred Years' War with a decisive victory over the English, Henry VI is told of the news and has a mental breakdown.
17 July 1453

First Battle of St Albans
The opening battle of the Wars of the Roses. St Albans is a small and scrappy battle but still leads to the death of three Lancastrian nobles.
22 May 1455

Hostilities resume
After years of strained peace, hostilities break out again, with Richard Neville scoring a victory against a numerically superior foe.
23 September 1459

The Battle of Ludford Bridge
Following a victory at Blore Heath, Yorkist supporters regroup at Ludford. However, a large army led by Henry VI arrives and many of the Yorkists flee.
12 October 1459

Battle of Hedgeley Moor
The brother of 'the Kingmaker' Warwick, John Neville, clashes with a Lancastrian force on his way to the border of Scotland to arrange a peace treaty.
25 April 1464

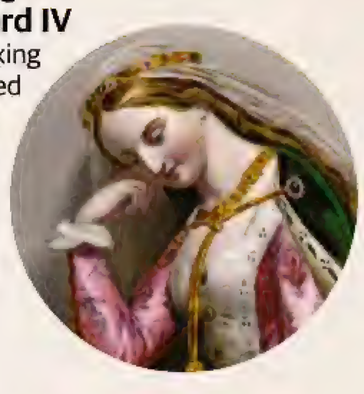
Edward IV's coronation
After clearing a path to the throne with a hard-fought victory at the Battle of Towton, Edward of York is crowned king in an official coronation in London. It is well-received by the public.
28 June 1461

Battle of Towton
The most brutal battle of the Wars of the Roses, this clash sees almost 30,000 men die in driving snow near the village of Towton, Yorkshire.
29 March 1461

Battle of Wakefield
The last battle for Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York. Riding out from a defensive position at Sandal Castle, Richard is killed by Lancastrian forces.
30 December 1460

York gets upper hand at Northampton
An interesting battle due to the Lancastrian Lord Edmund Grey switching side to the Yorkists mid-battle. The Yorkists won easily and gained the upper hand in the Wars.
10 July 1460

Elizabeth Woodville marries King Edward IV
Coming from a low-ranking family, Woodville is called "the most beautiful woman in the Island of Britain" and she uses this trait to marry advantageously, walking down the aisle with King Edward IV.
1 May 1464



Battle of Ferrybridge
A small, precursory skirmish before the decisive and bloody Battle of Towton, Ferrybridge sees the Yorkist leader Lord Fitzwalter killed in action.
28 March 1461

Second Battle of St Albans
The follow-up battle to the one that kickstarts the Wars of the Roses. This time there are more men, more deaths and, importantly, a Lancastrian victory.
17 February 1461

Lancastrian army routed
Following his father's defeat at Wakefield, Richard's son Edward routs a Lancastrian army under the leadership of Jasper Tudor.
2 February 1461

Act of Accord signed
As a compromise, it is agreed that Richard of York is the rightful successor to the throne after Henry VI. This deal excludes Henry's son, Edward of Lancaster, angering Margaret of Anjou.
October 1460

Richard becomes king
Despite being named as Lord Protector by Edward IV, Richard III is crowned king after the affair of the princes in the Tower.
6 July 1483

Buckingham revolts
Richard's ascension is immensely contentious and uprisings take place. One of the largest is a rebellion orchestrated by Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who is especially disaffected. However, his rebellion fails.
18 October 1483

The king's mother arrives at courts
Following her son Henry's victory at the Battle of Bosworth, Henry's mother, Margaret Beaufort, arrives at court and creates a new title for herself, 'My Lady the King's Mother', ensuring herself legal and social independence.
1485

Henry unites the Houses
In his marriage to Elizabeth of York, Henry VII finally unites the remnants of the two warring Houses of York and Lancaster. The product of this marriage marks the beginning of the House of Tudor and the Tudor Dynasty, which would go on to rule England until 24 March 1603.
18 January 1486

Anne Neville dies
The wife of embattled king Richard III dies of what is now believed to be tuberculosis at Westminster, London. There is an eclipse on the same day, which people see as an omen depicting the impending fall of Richard.
16 March 1485

Battle of Bosworth
The decisive and climactic battle of the War of the Roses sees the Yorkist king Richard III killed in combat, his 10,000-strong force routed. His enemy, the young and charismatic Henry Tudor, carve a direct path to the throne of England. He would be crowned Henry VII months later.
22 August 1485

The War of the Roses end
After more than 30 years of turmoil, chaos, warfare, infighting, backstabbing, side-changing, murdering and plotting, the Wars of the Roses end with Henry Tudor quashing the last remaining threat to the throne at the Battle of Stoke. He proceeds to rule for over 20 years, despite a couple of minor threats to his crown.
16 June 1487

© Joe Cummings; Look and Learn; Thinkstock; Mary Evans

ETON COLLEGE CHARTER

Artist: Henry VI

Having founded Eton College in 1440 – then known as 'Kynge's College of Our Ladye of Eton beside Windesore' – Henry VI was intent on providing a free education to 70 poor boys. He poured money into Eton College, gifting it with land, estates and treasures. However, when Edward IV took the throne in 1461, he confiscated much of the old king's endowments and school loot, leaving the school struggling financially.

1440s

© Mary Evans

LANCASTRIAN RULE

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During an era crowded with dynamic personalities, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, stood out as one of England's most powerful figures

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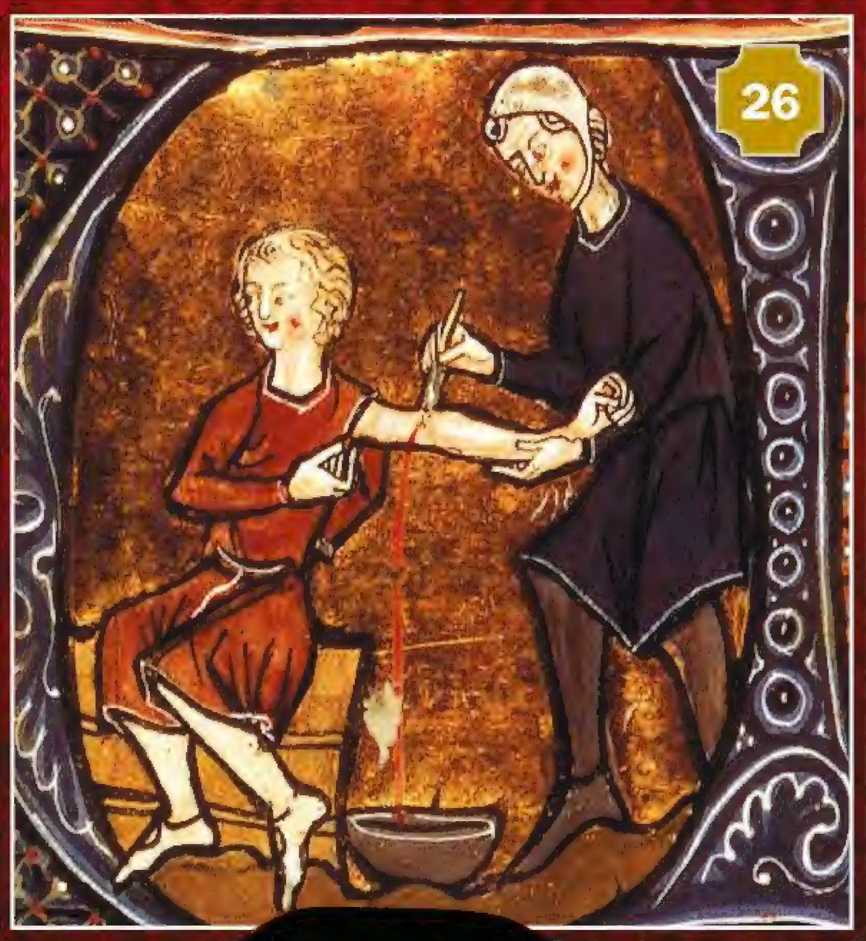
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KEY FIGURES 1455-60

After the formidable Henry V, his son's feeble and incompetent reign sparked a dynastic conflict that changed the face of 15th-century England – but which figures dominated the scene between 1455 and 1460?

Henry VI

ALLIANCE LANCASTER
LIFESPAN 49
POLITICAL PROWESS 1/10
MILITARY MIGHT 3/10

Alliance

Henry was the last king of England to come from the House of Lancaster.

Lifespan

Born in 1421, Henry died 1471. He was most likely murdered.

Political prowess

Henry struggled with mental instability throughout his life and was controlled by powerful members of the court.

Military might

As king, Henry was the nominal leader of the Lancastrians and their armies. However, in reality he was nothing more than a figurehead.

Overview

King of England since the tender age of nine months, Henry ultimately proved to be an ineffective and weak monarch. His frequent bouts of mental problems contributed to a power vacuum at the English court and the subsequent fighting between the Houses of York and Lancaster. With his death, the Lancastrians ceased to rule England, although the Lancastrian claim was inherited by Henry VII, who later became the founder of the Tudor dynasty, which ruled until 1603.

Margaret of Anjou

ALLIANCE LANCASTER
LIFESPAN 52
POLITICAL PROWESS 7/10
MILITARY MIGHT 9/10

Alliance

As Henry VI's wife, Margaret of Anjou was fiercely protective of the Lancastrian rights to throne, particularly on behalf of her son.

Lifespan

She was born 1430 and died in 1482 of unknown causes.

Political prowess

Margaret was a shrewd and formidable woman who sought powerful alliances to support the Lancastrians, even after Edward IV became king.

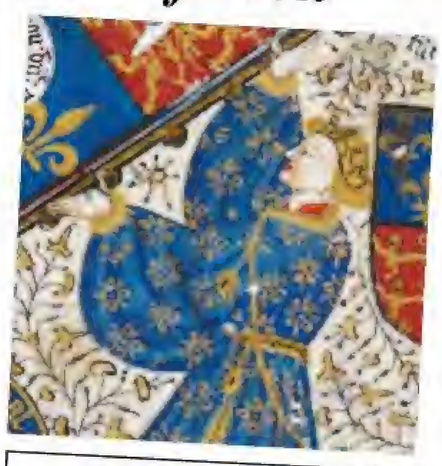
Military might

With her husband mentally incapable, it was left to Margaret to lead the way – she was even present at the Battle of Tewkesbury.

Overview

Fearful that Richard, Duke of York, desired to usurp the throne, Margaret did everything she could to remove him from power. During the ensuing Wars of the Roses, she led the Lancastrians and was determined to protect the rights of her husband and son, Edward, Prince of Wales. After their deaths, Margaret had no reason to fight and lived the rest of her life in France.

Richard of York



ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 49
POLITICAL PROWESS 7/10
MILITARY MIGHT 8/10

Alliance

Richard was a member of the House of York with a claim to the English throne.

Lifespan

Born in 1411, Richard was killed in battle in 1460.

Political prowess

Despite his conflict with the Lancastrians and general success as Lord Protector, Richard failed to gain enough support to be named king.

Military might

While victory moved between the Yorkists and Lancastrians, Richard succeeded in taking control over Henry before his death.

Overview

With his strong claim to the throne, Richard's conflict with the Lancastrians was a major contributor to the Wars of the Roses. He served as Lord Protector of the realm twice during Henry's mental instability and he even attempted to take the throne but received little support. However, Richard was named as Henry's heir following the Act of Accord, which disinherited Henry's son, Edward. However, he was killed two months later.

Richard Neville

ALLIANCE YORK & LANCASTER
LIFESPAN 42
POLITICAL PROWESS 10/10
MILITARY MIGHT 6/10

Alliance
A key figure for the Yorkist faction, Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick switched to the Lancastrians.

Lifespan
Born in 1428, he died in battle in 1471.

Political prowess
Warwick was adept at using political connections to his advantage, whether he was a Yorkist or Lancastrian.

Military might
Instrumental in Edward's rise to the throne, Warwick's later demise resulted from his reliance on traditional battlefield tactics.

Overview
Warwick joined forces with Edward, Earl of March, after the Duke of York's death. They succeeded in deposing Henry VI but Warwick rebelled against Edward following the rise of the Woodville family at court. After a failed attempt to depose Edward, Warwick fled to France and entered an alliance with Margaret of Anjou to restore Henry to the throne. He succeeded but was killed six months later.

Edward of March

ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 40
POLITICAL PROWESS 7/10
MILITARY MIGHT 9/10

Alliance
Edward was a member of the House of York and son of the first Yorkist contender, Richard, Duke of York.

Lifespan
Born 1442, he died in 1483, probably of pneumonia or typhoid.

Political prowess
During the Lancastrian reign, Edward was a small figure in the game of politics, with his father leading the cause. After his father's death, he allied himself with Warwick.

Military might
Over the course of his life, Edward celebrated the fact that he'd never lost in battle.

Overview
Assuming the Yorkist claim to the throne after his father's death, he successfully deposed Henry VI. His reign was turbulent thanks to the Lancastrians and the factions that dominated his court. Overthrown in 1470, he regained the throne six months later and ruled in peace until his death.

Edmund Beaufort

ALLIANCE LANCASTER
LIFESPAN C.48-49
POLITICAL PROWESS 4/10
MILITARY MIGHT 3/10

Alliance
Edmund was a member of the House of Lancaster and was a rival of Richard, Duke of York.

Lifespan
Edmund was born in 1406 and died in battle in 1455.

Political prowess
He allied himself with Margaret of Anjou and wielded control over Henry VI. However, it caused major conflict with the Yorkists.

Military might
As commander of the English army, Edmund oversaw a number of military failures that left him ridiculed.

Overview
Edmund's conflict with Richard, Duke of York, worsened as he worked alongside Margaret of Anjou to monopolise power at court. Rumours swirled that he was having an affair with Henry V's queen, Catherine of Valois, and was the true father of her son, Edward, although this was and has never been proven. Falling from power after Richard became Lord Protector, he was eventually killed at the First Battle of St Albans following Richard's determination to get rid of him.

Jacquetta of Luxembourg

ALLIANCE LANCASTER & YORK
LIFESPAN C.55-57
POLITICAL PROWESS 9/10
MILITARY MIGHT 1/10

Alliance
Once an ally of the Lancastrians, Jacquetta switched to the Yorkist side after her daughter, Elizabeth Woodville, married Edward IV.

Lifespan
Jacquetta was born around 1415 and died in 1472 of unknown causes.

Political prowess
As mother-in-law to the king, she oversaw the rise of her family at court and arranged advantageous marriages for her children.

Military might
Jacquetta was more involved with the inner workings of the court than military issues.

Overview
Her first husband was the son of Henry IV. Her second husband, Richard Woodville, was a prominent supporter of the Lancastrians until the Yorkist victory at the Battle of Towton. Afterwards, their daughter Elizabeth married the new king, Edward IV, and Jacquetta began to support the Yorkists. Her family became prominent at court but she faced accusations of witchcraft from her opponents.

Elizabeth Woodville

ALLIANCE LANCASTER & YORK
LIFESPAN 55
POLITICAL PROWESS 8/10
MILITARY MIGHT 1/10

Alliance
Originally married to a Lancastrian, Elizabeth supported the Yorkists after she was widowed and it seemed like the Lancastrian cause was dead.

Lifespan
Elizabeth was born circa 1437 and died of unknown causes in 1492.

Political prowess
She knew when to switch sides. Not only did she join the Yorkists through her marriage to Edward IV, but she worked alongside Margaret Beaufort against Richard III.

Military might
Elizabeth did little in terms of military matters.

Overview
As a Lancastrian widow and mother, her clandestine marriage to Edward IV caused a huge scandal and his turbulent reign saw him deposed and restored to the throne. Their children, including the Princes in the Tower, were declared illegitimate following Edward's death and Richard III became king. Elizabeth opposed him and allied with Margaret Beaufort, arranging a marriage between her daughter and Margaret's son to unite the Houses of York and Lancaster.

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Battles & Bloodshed 1455-1460

In 1455, England was plunged into a bloody civil war. Discover the defining battles that shaped the early years of the Wars of the Roses

Written by William E Welsh

First Battle of St Albans
22 May 1455
Yorkist victory

Reformer Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, and his Neville allies ambushed King Henry VI's entourage at St Albans on its way to a great council at Leicester. Despite a stout defence at the town's barricaded gates, Richard Neville's Midlanders broke into the town. A fierce melee unfolded at the marketplace. Lord Clifford, Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland, and Edmund Beaufort, 2nd Duke of Somerset, were slain in the confused fighting. York took Henry prisoner and established the Second Protectorate.

Blore Heath
23 September 1459
Yorkist victory

Lancastrian James Touchet, Lord Audley, intercepted the forces of Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, as they marched to join the Yorkist army at Ludlow Castle. Audley was tasked with arresting Neville and preventing his troops from reaching the castle. Audley twice charged the Yorkists with his cavalry, losing his life in the second charge. Command devolved to John Sutton, Lord Dudley, who led a dismounted assault that failed. Thereafter, the Lancastrian army unravelled and the Yorkists triumphed.

Ludford Bridge
12-13 October 1459
Lancastrian victory

The Lancastrian royal army, led by Humphrey Stafford, 1st Duke of Buckingham, deployed for battle at Ludford Bridge in Shropshire against an entrenched Yorkist army led by Richard, Duke of York. A contingent from the Calais garrison defected to the Lancastrians the first night. Finding themselves heavily outnumbered as a result of the defection, York, his two sons and the earls of Salisbury and Warwick abandoned their army and fled to Wales. The Yorkist army was forced to disperse the following morning.

Battle of Northampton
10 July 1460
Yorkist victory

On its way back to London from Coventry, Henry VI's army entrenched at Northampton in anticipation of an attack by a Yorkist army led by Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick. When Warwick attacked the Lancastrian right, Edmund Grey's men, who were holding that part of the line, defected to the Yorkists. Once inside the enemy lines, Warwick's troops finished off the Lancastrians. The Duke of Buckingham was slain, and King Henry VI again became a Yorkist prisoner.

Battle of Wakefield
30 December 1460
Lancastrian victory

Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, travelled to Sandal Magna in Yorkshire in early winter to raise additional troops to prop up his position as Lord Protector. He also wanted to defeat a sizeable Lancastrian army that had assembled at Pontefract Castle under the command of Henry Beaufort, 3rd Duke of Somerset. The Lancastrians lured York into battle outside Sandal Magna and killed him. York's second son Edmund was slain as he attempted to flee.

"York, his two sons and the earls of Salisbury and Warwick abandoned their army and fled to Wales"

SCOTLAND
Lancastrian victory
Yorkist victory
Tudor victory
Hedgeley Moor
Hexham
Towton
YORK
Ferrybridge
Wakefield
Stoke
Blore Heath
WALES
Bosworth
Ludford Bridge
Mortimer's Cross
Edgecote Moor
Northampton
St Albans
Tewkesbury
Barnet
LONDON
ENGLAND

MAD KING HENRY

In an already troubled realm, Henry VI's descent into illness fanned the flames of discord and provoked conflicts that would bring England ever closer to the brink of civil war

Written by Jon Wright

In early August 1453, while residing at a royal hunting lodge close to Salisbury, Henry VI succumbed to a devastating and rather mysterious illness. As Abbot Whethamstede reported, a "disorder of such a sort overcame the king that he lost his wits and memory for a time, and nearly all his body was so uncoordinated... that he could neither walk, nor hold his head upright, nor easily move from where he sat".

A reliable diagnosis of Henry's ailment has never been easy to establish. Some have suggested a bout of deep depression brought on by the shock of losing Gascony to the French: news of the disastrous battle of Castillon on 17 July will likely have reached Henry in the first few days of August. Others have pointed to the mental instability that ran in Henry's family, most notably in his maternal grandfather Charles VI of France. More exotic theories, including catatonic schizophrenia, have also been proposed. All told, it is probably wise to heed the advice of historian Ralph Griffiths, who wrote of Henry's illness that "speculation as to its nature is perhaps fruitless after a lapse of two-and-a-half centuries".

We can be certain, however, that Henry's ailment was extremely serious and lasted for almost 17 months. At first the king was unable to feed himself and seems to have lost any ability to recognise even those closest to him. In October 1453, Henry's son, Edward, was born, an event of profound importance for the Lancastrian dynasty. However, when the child was introduced to Henry in early January, the king exhibited not the slightest spark of emotion. As one contemporary reported, "The duke of Buckingham took [Edward] in his

Henry VI painted by an unknown artist in the 16th century

The First Battle of St Albans

Inside the first major skirmish of the Wars of the Roses

Noble deaths

While the death toll at St Albans was not especially high, two leading figures, the Duke of Somerset and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, met their ends. An alarming number of Lancastrian nobles, including the Duke of Buckingham, were seriously injured. It is said that the Earl of Wiltshire disguised himself as a monk and fled the scene.

The price of archers

The Lancastrian forces, largely made up of noble retinues, were woefully lacking in archers. The Yorkists, by contrast, had a contingent of 600 bowmen from the Scottish marches who played a pivotal role in securing victory.

A balanced act

The Lancastrians had between 2,000 and 2,500 troops at their disposal during the battle. It is sometimes suggested that the Yorkists had as many as 5,000 or even 7,000 troops in the field but, since many of the anticipated forces did not materialise, the figure is more likely to have been in the region of around 3,000.

arms and pressed him to the king in goodly wise, beseeching the king to bless him," but Henry "in no manner answered". The queen also attempted to rouse Henry's interest, "but all their labour was in vain". Matters had not improved by March 1454 when a delegation from parliament arrived to assess Henry's condition. They too "could obtain no answer, word or sign," and "with sorrowful hearts they came away".

As those parliamentarians most certainly realised, the political risks of Henry's illness, the most debilitating condition endured by an English king, were weighty. The past three years had seen Henry's popularity plummet, the economic malaise had only deepened, and the last thing the nation required was an incapacitated ruler.

The year of 1453 had actually begun rather well for Henry. He had performed with gusto during sessions of parliament, pledging to be a "gracious and benevolent lord," and had even considered making a grand tour of the kingdom to calm tensions in the shires. Soon enough, however, the same old problems of governance had surfaced, notably an escalation in the rivalry between the great Percy and Neville families in the north, which Henry seemed entirely incapable of holding in check. Now, with the king languishing in his sick bed, finding someone to assume the reins of

Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, was the Duke of York's great rival. Here he is seen conducting negotiations with the French at Rouen

power was a matter of the utmost urgency. But who could be trusted?

Henry's wife Margaret of Anjou made it abundantly clear that she would have been delighted to serve as regent, but this course was deemed inadvisable by most of the political elite. Many eyes turned instead to Richard, Duke of York. In many ways, York was a problematic candidate. He had served as the king's lieutenant in Normandy for two spells during the 1430s and 1440s but, following his return to England in 1445, relations with the king had become increasingly strained. It is sometimes suggested that even from this early date York harboured a desire to challenge for the crown, but this seems unlikely.

Through the 1440s York may have endured criticism of his activities in France, but his wealth continued to accrue and, while not at the very heart of power, he retained considerable influence. Even so, he was assuredly, insulted when his tenure as lieutenant in France was not renewed and no doubt dismayed when the post went to his great rival Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset. For all that, the position offered to York instead – the lieutenancy in Ireland – was prestigious and lucrative, so when he crossed the Irish Sea in 1449 there was no indication that within a few years he would be wreaking havoc.

York's alienation from the regime began to fester following his unexpected, and uninvited, return from Ireland in September 1450. York had been mentioned favourably by Jack Cade and his rebels, and York joined the chorus calling for the removal of Henry's untrustworthy ministers, a move that hardly endeared him to the monarch.

The abbey at St Albans. In the wake of the battle Henry was taken here to be greeted with pledges of allegiance from Richard of York and his comrades

Richard, 3rd Duke of York, protector of the kingdom during Henry's illness and victor at the First Battle of St Albans

Matters became even more tense in 1452, with York's animus against the Duke of Somerset reaching such a pitch that armies were raised and conflict only narrowly averted. In the aftermath of these prickly events, York was obliged, rather humiliatingly, to make solemn oaths never to rise against the king in rebellion. When we add the fact that York, a direct descendant of Edward III, had legitimate claims to the throne, it may seem odd that he was perceived as the best man to guide the realm while Henry was indisposed. The birth of Henry's son was extremely helpful, however, as York immediately ceased to be heir presumptive, and support from the mighty Neville family also proved vital.

Even so, York was summoned to London in October 1453, arriving on 12 November. During February of the following year, parliament determined to offer York the role of Protector of the Realm and, after Henry's health was evaluated in March, York assumed power. These decisions were not taken with any enthusiasm and, tellingly, the level of absenteeism during the parliamentary sessions reached record levels, but York had emerged as the least bad option.

The protectorship was far from a disaster. York adopted a broadly conciliatory approach, resisting the urge to conduct purges and even managing to take sensible steps towards reducing the expenditure of the royal household (as well as enriching himself). One contemporary concluded that, for a whole year, York "governed the whole realm of England most nobly and in the best way". Unfortunately for the duke, many of the leading figures who had surrounded Henry and Somerset, and those who still held influence in Margaret of Anjou's hostile household, remained firmly entrenched. York's room for political manoeuvre was curtailed, conflicts between the Nevilles and the Percies continued to simmer, and the machinations of leading figures, notably Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter, made it clear that York had not lost his talent for cultivating enemies.

York's frustrating position was not destined to last for long, however. Around Christmas 1454, the king made a sudden and unexpected recovery. Henry claimed to have no memory of the previous 17 months, and his health would be fragile for the remainder of his life, but he was now able to assert his political will. York's rival, Somerset, regained his freedom and, sensing where the political tides were flowing, York resigned the protectorship in February 1455.

The sense of political tension during early 1455 was palpable. Proposals were made for a great council in Leicester, but the Yorkist leaders, who had already exited en masse from court, feared what might be decided there. For his part, Richard of York thought it prudent to head north and secure troops. The Yorkists were ordered to stand down, but these demands went unheeded and, when the king and his entourage left London in May, the Yorkists determined to intervene. The First Battle of St Albans was really more of a skirmish, lasting less than an hour and claiming

A Medieval doctor performing bloodletting on his patient

Treating Henry

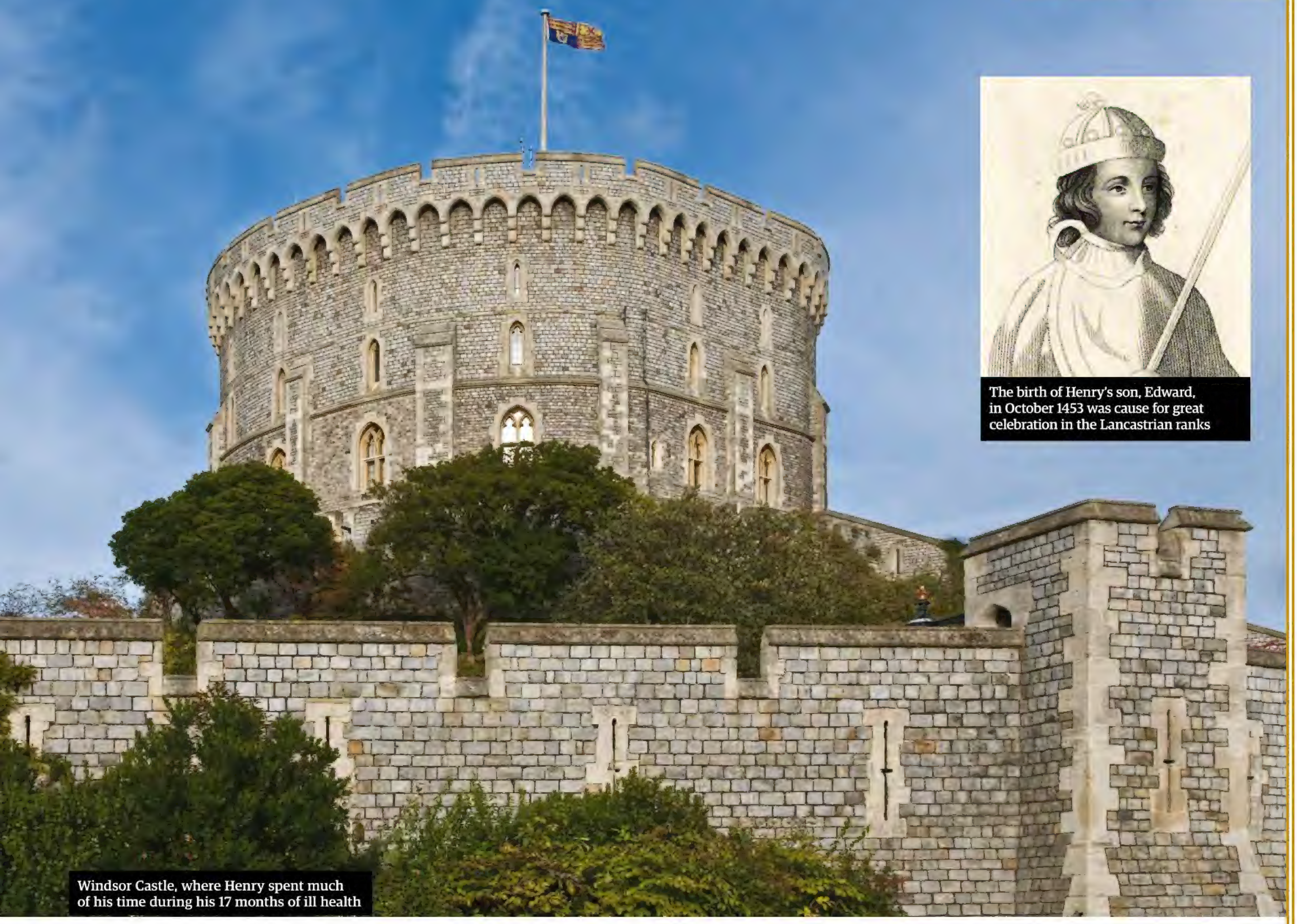
How did Medieval medical science approach Henry's condition?

As one might expect, Henry VI was assigned a crack team of medical professionals to oversee his care. Three physicians and two surgeons were formally appointed in March 1454. They included John Arundell, an Oxford medical graduate and now a canon at St George's Chapel, Windsor, and William Hattecliffe who had studied at Peterhouse, Cambridge, and the University of Padua in Italy. He had been in royal service since November 1452.

All manner of treatments were prescribed, from laxatives to poultices, and from blood-letting to 'head purges', which involved the application of extreme heat to the scalp. Following prevailing medical orthodoxies, the goal was to restore the king's humoral balance: it was assumed that Henry's condition derived from colder and wetter humours, such as blood and phlegm, becoming dominant. It is significant, too, that these 'masters of physick' were also clerics. As the doctors' commission explained, "We, by divine visitation, suffer from bodily ill health from which we hope to be able to be freed if it please Him who is the true health of all things." Prayer was thus as important as scientific know-how in the curing of disease.

"All manner of treatments were prescribed, from laxatives to poultices, and from blood-letting to 'head purges'"

The birth of Henry's son, Edward, in October 1453 was cause for great celebration in the Lancastrian ranks



Windsor Castle, where Henry spent much of his time during his 17 months of ill health

no more than a few dozen lives, but it marked a crucial turning point in English history. The Wars of the Roses proper were still four years away, but David Hume, writing in his *History of England* in the 18th century, was not entirely unjustified when he identified in the First Battle of St Albans "the first blood spilt in that fatal quarrel, which was not finished in less than thirty years".

It is crucial to stress that, at this juncture, the Yorkists were not bent on overthrowing Henry VI: the Duke of York would not lay claim to the throne for another five years. The goal here was to remove Somerset from power and regain influence over the monarch. Events at St Albans on 22 May saw the definitive accomplishment the first of these objectives and went some way towards achieving the second.

The king and his Lancastrian forces, led by the Duke of Buckingham, were the first to arrive at St Albans, probably at around seven o'clock in the morning. The Yorkists had spent the previous night encamped between St Albans and Ware. The Lancastrians established their headquarters in the town's abbey and Moot Hall and erected makeshift defences. Progressing to Keyfield, outside the town, the Yorkists engaged in several hours' worth of negotiation via heralds with the enemy, and it seems that the Lancastrians believed that some kind of settlement was highly likely: they were certainly sluggish when it came to putting on their armour. However, their hopes were dashed when the Yorkist onslaught began.

"With a Yorkist victory secured, Richard and the other Yorkist leaders fell to their knees and pledged full allegiance to Henry"

The first assaults proved fruitless; narrow lanes and barricades prevented significant Yorkist incursion. Then, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, launched a surprise attack at a weak point in the town's defences. Troops poured in, archers killing many of those surrounding the king (who was wounded in the neck) and Somerset, after seeking refuge in the Castle Inn, was put to the sword.

King Henry, finding himself all but abandoned, fled to a nearby tanner's house, and when news of this reached York, orders were despatched to move the king to St Albans abbey. Here, with a Yorkist victory secured, Richard and the other Yorkist leaders fell to their knees and pledged their full allegiance to Henry.

In the wake of the battle strenuous efforts were made to demonstrate a return to normality. Henry and York travelled together back to London, and when Henry suffered some variety of relapse later in the year, York once more took up office as Protector of the Realm. His tenure only lasted from November 1455 to the following February.

The animosities unleashed at St Albans and the tensions that underlay them could not easily be contained. Within a few short years England would descend into full-scale civil disorder and the bloody Wars of the Roses, with York once more playing a starring - if short-lived - role in the drama that unfolded.

KINGS OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Artist: Hendrick Goltzius

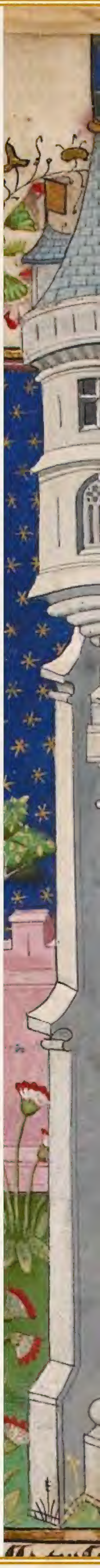
This Dutch print is part of a series depicting the kings and queens of England. Here, we see the Yorkist kings during the Wars of the Roses – Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III. As described in contemporary chronicles, Edward IV is shown as a tall, strong warrior king in contrast to the stubby, feeble-looking Richard III – a Tudor perception of Richard which has endured the centuries, even today.

1584

MARGARET OF ANJOU WARLADY

How the daughter of an impoverished duke of France became one of the most controversial queens in English history

Written by Jessica Leggett



When Margaret of Anjou's marriage to King Henry VI of England was arranged in 1445 in the name of peace, no one could have foreseen that it would contribute to the bloody civil war that would engulf England just ten years later.

Born in 1430, Margaret was the bright and educated daughter of René, Duke of Anjou, and Isabella, Duchess of Lorraine. Through her paternal aunt, Marie of Anjou, she was also the niece of the king of France, Charles VII.

Since the 14th century, the Hundred Years' War had raged on between France and England over the succession to the French throne. Margaret and Henry's marriage provided a much-needed break for the two countries, and the couple were married at Titchfield Abbey in Hampshire. Just 15, the new queen was crowned at Westminster Abbey less than a month later.

The two were completely different. Henry was a weak king who had ruled England since he was just a few months old, albeit with a regency until he was 16. Political factions dominated his court, which he failed to control, and his ability to rule was hampered by frequent periods of mental instability. Margaret, on the other hand, was a proud, strong and ambitious woman.

From the beginning, it was obvious that the marriage was not popular among the English. After all, they had spent the past century in and out of conflict with France, and now they had to accept a French woman as their queen. Margaret was in a difficult position, trying to support her vulnerable husband in a country where she was unwelcome.

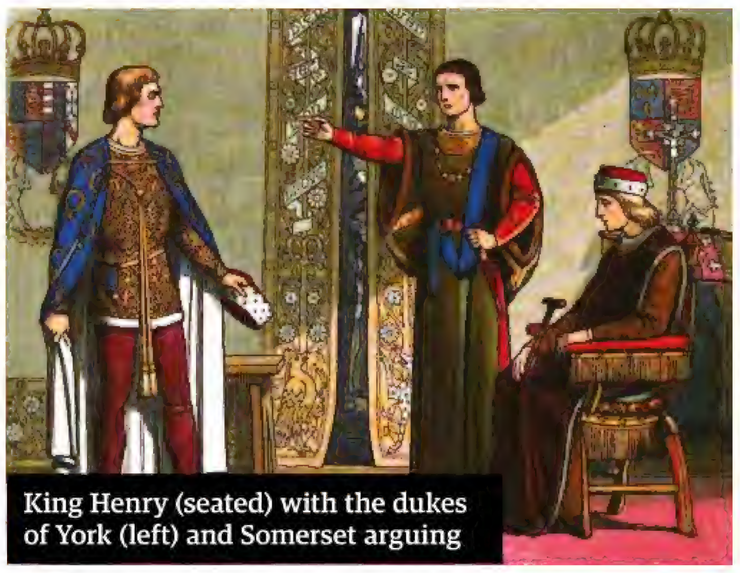
The royal marriage was not that advantageous for Henry considering Margaret's father had little money and he didn't provide a marriage dowry. But Henry urgently

The marriage of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou as depicted in the *Talbot Shrewsbury Books*

needed a male heir to secure the Lancastrian dynasty, and it was hoped that Margaret would solve this. The problem was the king showed little interest in sexual relations at all. He was a shy, timid and religious man, hardly the ingredients needed for a passionate relationship with his wife.

The queen had her work cut out, but after eight barren years she finally succeeded when she gave birth to a boy, Edward, Prince of Wales, in October 1453. It should have been a time of joy and celebration. Instead, just two months prior the king had suffered a complete mental breakdown. Margaret had to protect the Lancastrian dynasty in the face of the power struggle that ensued.

The queen hoped to secure the regency for her son to protect him as a lioness would protect her cubs - Margaret needed to fight for power. Of course, a woman acting as a regent was not an unusual concept to Margaret; her mother had done so on behalf of her father a decade earlier. But she was no longer in France. England was far less welcoming to the idea of female rule, and the queen's quest to secure the regency failed.



King Henry (seated) with the dukes of York (left) and Somerset arguing

Although frustrated, Margaret would not let this stop her from protecting her son.

Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, was appointed as regent for Henry during his illness. Before the birth of Prince Edward, York had the strongest claim to the English throne after the king. Margaret's relationship with York was poor, particularly as she was allies with his rival Edward Beaufort, Duke of Somerset. In fact, there were those at court who even suspected that Margaret and Somerset were lovers and that he was the prince's father.

This strained relationship deteriorated further as Margaret feared York would depose her husband and seize the crown for himself - suspicions that worsened when York had Somerset imprisoned in the Tower of London. Luckily, for both Margaret and Somerset, the king regained his senses towards the end of 1454. Using her influence over her husband, Margaret convinced him to remove York from court, while Somerset was released.

Margaret became the de facto leader of the Lancastrians on behalf of her husband, determined to exclude the Yorkists from power. Her actions angered the Duke of York, and in May 1455 he gathered his forces from the north and began to make his way south to confront the Lancastrians. York claimed that he was acting to protect the king, but in reality his actions marked the start of an all-out war.

The First Battle of St Albans on the 22 May was a complete disaster for Margaret. The Lancastrians were heavily defeated, Somerset was killed in the chaos and the king brought under Yorkist control. The Duke of York was named Lord Protector for the Realm while the queen's position was weakened. On the surface an uneasy peace had been reached, but Margaret cunningly worked behind the scenes to stir up Lancastrian support against her sworn enemy.

"The First Battle of St Albans was a disaster for Margaret. The Lancastrians were defeated, Somerset was killed and the king brought under Yorkist control"

A miniature depiction of the Battle of Tewkesbury, as illustrated in the *Ghent Manuscript*

The Marriage of Henry VI with Margaret of A
From a Fac-simile of a Painting on glass, in the possession of M
Bt. as the art directs by J. Carter Hamilton, Esq.r Hyde P

By 1459, hostilities between the two factions broke out again. Victory swayed between the Lancastrians and the Yorkists, as the former won at the Battle of Ludford towards the end of the year, only to lose at the Battle of Northampton in 1460. The loss at Northampton was a nightmare for the queen as King Henry was captured. It was at this point that Margaret's greatest fear was realised, as Henry was forced to agree to the Act of Accord, a parliamentary act that recognised York and his descendants as Henry's heirs, thereby disinheriting Prince Edward.

Incensed, Margaret fled to Wales and later Scotland with her son to garner support. While she remained there the Lancastrians secured a much-needed victory at the Battle of Wakefield in December, in which York and many of his leaders were killed. However, the Yorkist threat was not over as York's son Edward, Earl of March, and his nephew, the Earl of Warwick, assumed leadership of the faction.

Two months later, in February 1461, the two sides met once again at the Second Battle of St Albans as the Lancastrians marched towards London. Margaret was present during the battle and oversaw the defeat of the Yorkists, regaining her husband in the process. They wanted to return to the capital, but the queen hadn't anticipated that the Londoners would refuse her entry thanks to the Lancastrian reputation for violence and ransacking. With Edward and Warwick moving south with their armies, Margaret was forced to withdraw north, where the two sides met again at the Battle of Towton in March.

The marriage between Margaret and Henry was supposed to provide England with peace

The battle was a complete fiasco for the queen. The Lancastrian forces were crushed, and Margaret fled into exile with the king and their son. Edward, Earl of March, was proclaimed king as Edward IV, and he sent Warwick to squash the remaining Lancastrian rebels in the north. Over the next few years Margaret continued to encourage Lancastrian rebellions but, despite efforts to hide him, her husband was recaptured in 1465. Left with little choice, Margaret sought refuge with her son in France, a nation ruled by her cousin King Louis XI. The deposed queen had to regroup now that the throne had been lost, and she attempted to drum up support for her cause.

After years waiting in the shadows, fate – or even sheer luck – decided to give Margaret an opportunity that she couldn't have foreseen. In 1470, Warwick had fled to France after falling out with King Edward over the latter's controversial marriage to Elizabeth Woodville and the rise of her family at court. After leading a failed rebellion against his former friend, Warwick, also known as 'the kingmaker' was plotting his revenge. Realising that Margaret would be a powerful ally, he reached out to her via King Louis.

Margaret was sceptical about partnering with a man whom she would have gladly seen dead. However, she also knew he was her best shot at deposing Edward: after all, the earl was not known as the kingmaker for no reason. He promised to restore her husband to the throne, but Margaret did not let her guard down. She insisted that Warwick prove his loyalty by heading to England first, without her, to restore her husband. If he succeeded, she would follow him with her army.

A dangerous alliance was formed, and as further proof of Warwick's sincerity his daughter Anne was betrothed to Prince Edward. Warwick landed in England in September and his rebellion quickly gained support. The king, unprepared for such an attack, was forced to flee the country, and by October the kingmaker had restored Henry to the throne. Satisfied that Warwick had fulfilled his duty, Margaret oversaw the marriage between Anne and Edward that December and readied her troops to return to England.

However, bad weather prevented the queen crossing the Channel. By the time she arrived in England the tide had changed. Edward had returned along with his armies, facing Warwick at the Battle of Barnet on 14 April 1471. Warwick was killed just as Margaret set foot on English soil. The queen lost her ally and King Henry was recaptured, yet Margaret refused to back down.

Taking control of the Lancastrian army, she faced the Yorkists at the Battle of Tewkesbury on 4 May 1471. Despite her efforts, Margaret's forces were defeated and her reason for fighting on disappeared as her beloved son was killed. Heartbroken, Margaret was taken captive and imprisoned in the Tower of London along with her husband. Less than two weeks later Henry died, most likely assassinated on Edward's orders.

In 1475, King Louis paid a ransom for Margaret, who was forced to renounce her claims to the English throne as well as the French inheritance of her parents. Margaret spent the rest of her days impoverished, living on a pension provided by Louis until she died in 1482. While she ultimately failed to retain the throne for the Lancastrians, Margaret proved a defiant and powerful woman, just as capable of warmongering as the men around her.

Margaret of Anjou's black legend?

The smear campaign that tarnishes the queen's reputation to this day

In one of her most iconic portrayals, Margaret is referred to as a "foul wrinkled witch" in Shakespeare's play, *Richard III*. Such ridiculing remarks were commonplace for centuries – claiming or calling a woman a witch was one of the best ways to disparage her, particularly if she was in a position of influence. Yet, until she perceived that her husband and son were under threat from the Duke of York, Margaret showed little political ambition. Having grown up around powerful, educated women in France like her mother, Margaret knew that royal authority had to be fought for.

Margaret proved herself to be a formidable queen. Faced with a completely incapable husband and the political intrigue of the English court, she was left with no choice but to lead the Lancastrian cause herself. But despite this, Margaret's behaviour was deemed unnatural for a woman of her time.

As a result of this, she has been condemned as a villainous female who did not know her rightful place and dominated her husband, an opinion that is still popular today. Unfortunately, this is partly because Margaret was on the losing side in the Wars of the Roses – and history is always written by the winners.

Henry VI's consort, Queen Margaret, places a paper crown on the decapitated head of Richard of York following the Battle of Wakefield

THE BATTLE OF WAKEFIELD

Richard of York's death in battle did not, as might have been expected, end the war

Written by Derek Wilson

In the autumn of 1460, having obtained possession of the insane king and enforced an agreement naming himself as Henry VI's heir, the Duke of York felt reasonably secure. He had the backing of the city of London and he sent his son, Edward, Earl of March, to secure control in Wales. York himself set out for the north where Queen Margaret was busily mustering support among the northern nobles. On 21 December, he established his base at Sandal Castle, near Wakefield, from where he despatched messages to his supporters asking them to muster there. His enemies converged near Kingston upon Hull, to the east, from where they carried out plundering raids on Richard's territory, before advancing towards Sandal.

The details of the ensuing battle are not very clear but the outcome was probably decided by several factors: foul weather, numbers, divided loyalties, an untenable position, rash tactics and Lancastrian cunning.

While the Lancastrians were already established in the area, Richard's forces had to converge from different directions and were slowed down by the adverse conditions. Particularly, the duke was devoid of cannon, which was sent from London but had to turn back because the highways were too muddy for the heavy artillery wagons.

According to the best available contemporary records, the Lancastrian host numbered around 15,000 and they had good supply lines to their northern power bases. The size of Richard's army

Who decides who wears the crown?

How to figure out who's supposed to rule – and how to get rid of them

On 8 November 1460, Richard, Duke of York, was declared heir apparent to Henry VI. Queen Margaret rejected this, insisting that her son by Henry VI, Edward, was the rightful heir. It was her determination that led to the Battle of Wakefield the following month. Who was right and by what authority should such matters be determined?

Everyone agreed that God was the ultimate sovereign and that he appointed kings to rule in his name. But how did he make his will known? There were three possibilities – hereditary descent, agreement of the people by parliamentary vote, or conquest. Both Richard and Henry were directly descended from Edward III. But the Yorkists claimed that Henry VI's grandfather, Henry IV, had murdered God's anointed monarch (Richard II), had no *hereditary* rights and had usurped the crown by conquest.

However, the lawmen pointed out that Henry IV and his descendants had been proclaimed kings by Acts of Parliament and that Richard of York had sworn allegiance to Henry VI. The reigning king might be mentally incapable but he could not be legally deposed. However, Richard was in a position to overawe Parliament and the result was a compromise whereby he would be regent and the crown would come to him or his heir on Henry's death. By disqualifying Prince Edward's title, the lawlords were, in effect, agreeing that the Lancastrian claim was weak by virtue of Edward III's usurpation. Was this the clincher? Did ultimate authority lie with Parliament? Or were Lords and Commons simply overawed by the claimant who, for the moment, held the whip hand? Centuries later, the poet William Wordsworth perhaps provided the answer:

"The good old rule sufficeth them,
the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power
And they should keep, who can."

The coronation of Henry IV, Henry VI's grandfather, who usurped the crown from Richard II in 1399

has been much disputed. Some estimates put it at 9,000; others number the Yorkist complement in three figures. Whatever the truth of the matter may be, Richard's men were seriously outnumbered. On his way from London he had already lost some in a skirmish at Worksop. The expected reinforcements under the earl of March had yet to arrive.

The great families of the north were more interested in sustaining and extending their power than in establishing who should be king and giving their candidate unqualified support. For example, the Nevilles, who commanded large swathes of Lancashire and Westmorland were divided; some followed the earl of Salisbury, York's ally, while others, led by John Neville of Raby, believed their best interests lay in supporting Queen Margaret.

By choosing Sandal as his base, Richard had walked into a trap of his own devising. He and his men were virtually under siege when his enemies cut his supply lines. As winter drew on there was little food to be gleaned from the surrounding area. By the end of the month, Richard's position was becoming almost untenable.

Rash tactics also contributed to the Yorkist failure at the Battle of Wakefield. Impatiently

"By choosing Sandal as his base Richard had walked into a trap of his own devising"

waiting for the earls of March and Warwick, who were bringing fresh reinforcements from the Midlands, York decided to take the offensive, no doubt hoping to surprise the enemy with a sudden, unexpected move. Proper reconnaissance would have revealed the real strength of the enemy.

One chronicle suggests that York was tricked into offering battle by one of the Lancastrian generals, Sir Andrew Trollope. He was a turncoat who had defected to the enemy and was now a joint leader of the Lancastrian host with the earl of Somerset. Concealing half of the army in woodland, he marched towards the castle and lured York out for what would apparently have been an even contest.

Several other theories exist to explain the catastrophic failure of the Yorkists. Contemporary chroniclers and others writing shortly afterwards offered various explanations for York's suicidal foray from the security of the castle on 30 December 1460 to the open field of Wakefield Green between Sandal and the River Calder, where his force was heavily outnumbered. Some suggest that he mistook Trollope's contingent for his expected reinforcements, while others claim that the Lancastrians deliberately displayed false colours to reinforce this delusion. There are those who assert that a truce had been agreed and that Richard came out of the castle for some kind of parley that his treacherous foe turned into an ambush.

Whatever the truth, the battle was over very quickly. Yorkist losses were heavy though, again, reliable statistics are lacking. All Richard's principal supports, including his son Edmund, Earl of Rutland and the earl of Salisbury, were killed in battle or summarily executed afterwards. The duke of York was, himself, decapitated and his head was displayed on the walls of the city of York, wearing a paper crown. This did not put an end to the Wars of the Roses. If anything, the conflict became more bitter and personal. Richard's family and friends were bent on revenge.

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WARWICK THE KINGMAKER

During an era crowded with dynamic personalities, Richard Neville, the 16th Earl of Warwick, stood out as one of England's most powerful figures

Written by Jon Wright

Richard Neville (1428–1471) was born into a northern family of immense wealth and potent political influence. With vast northern estates, the Nevilles were reputedly able to put 10,000 troops into the field, and the future power base of Richard, an eldest son, was greatly enhanced through marriage to Anne Beauchamp: lands in the Midlands, southern England and South Wales came under his sway.

Few details of Neville's early life survive, but he made a notable entry into public life when he formally took up the title of Earl of Warwick in 1449. Given his later, unremitting interventions in English politics, it is perhaps surprising that Warwick appears to have been largely uninterested in affairs of state at this early stage of his career: he had a seat on the king's council but attended meetings rarely, if at all, during the early 1450s. Increasing animosity towards the Duke of Somerset, a passion shared both by Warwick's father (the elder Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury) and Richard, Duke of York, galvanised his political ambitions.

The support of the Nevilles was crucial to York's rise to influence and, while Warwick played only a minor role in York's First Protectorate (March 1454–February 1455), he emerged as a key figure following York's fall from favour. A link by marriage (the Duke of York had taken

Warwick's aunt, Cecily, as his bride in 1429) also helped to secure the alliance.

At the First Battle of St Albans in May 1455, Neville's surprise attack against the Lancastrian forces inside the town secured victory. York's subsequent Second Protectorate was only short lived, but one significant achievement was the election of Warwick as captain of Calais. The town was of crucial commercial and strategic importance and home to a sizeable standing army, and its role as a Yorkist stronghold would prove vital over the coming years.

At Calais, Warwick behaved with a marked lack of diplomatic discretion, routinely assaulting ships in the English Channel (including those belonging to the Spanish and the Hanseatic League) regardless of existing treaties and truces between England and foreign powers. This secured Warwick immense popularity among the mercantile classes and an equal degree of censure from Henry VI's government. The chastisements Warwick received from Henry did little to strengthen the bonds between the two men.

By 1459, Richard of York's alienation from Henry was also reaching fever pitch and, fearful of moves being made against them, York and the Nevilles launched a pre-emptive rebellion. Some 600 men from Calais, under the command of Andrew Trollope, were involved. The gambit was a disaster, culminating in defeat at Ludford Bridge, near Ludlow, in October. Yorkist troops fled the scene, the Yorkist leadership scurried for safety and acts of attainder were issued against the ringleaders. Warwick was also stripped of the Calais captaincy, but the attempts to dislodge him during the winter of 1459–60, led by Henry, Duke of Somerset, proved unsuccessful.

The Yorkists now had to calculate their next manoeuvre. Warwick and York met in Waterford, Ireland, in March 1460, and it seems that York at least was now determined to remove Henry VI from the throne. This was a controversial move in the minds of the Yorkist leadership, not least because their earlier actions had been rooted in the claim that they were set on ridding Henry of evil counsel, not replacing the king. York, however, was not to be deterred. An efficient propaganda campaign was launched from the continent. Poems, some of which reached the gates of Canterbury, declared that "peace is withdrawn and God's merciful hand/Exalted is falsehood, truth is laid down" and lionised York, his son Edward – "whose fame the earth shall spread" – and, of course, "Richard, earl of Warwick, shield of our defence". When Yorkist troops arrived at Sandwich in June 1460, many Kentish men rallied to the cause and victory at Northampton on 10 July delivered the king into Yorkist hands.

By mid-October York was directly claiming the crown, but a compromise was reached through the Act of Accord of 25 October that allowed Henry VI to remain on the throne so long as York was named as his heir. This was a futile move since it disinherited Henry's son Edward and could only delay further conflict. Sure enough, by late December rival armies were clashing at the Battle of Wakefield, during which both York and Warwick's brother Thomas lost their lives.

The victorious Lancastrians soon headed south, and Warwick, who had remained behind in London, went out to meet them. A major defeat was inflicted at the Second Battle of St Albans in February 1461, largely due to Warwick's clumsy strategies, but troops led by York's son Edward, fresh from victory at Mortimer's Cross, rallied to Warwick's side. By 17 February Edward and Warwick were entering London, and by March York's son had claimed the throne as Edward IV.

Revenge was uppermost in Yorkist minds. As early as 29 March the Yorkists soundly defeated the Lancastrians at Towton, by some measure the bloodiest battle of the Wars of the Roses and one involving as many as 50,000 combatants. Warwick, carrying a minor injury, may only have played a small role in proceedings. By November, at Edward's first parliament, Lancastrian guilt was being loudly pronounced. For decades it was averred the country had witnessed "unrest, inward war and trouble... shedding and effusion

Calais (pictured here under siege in the 1340s) had become one of England's most important strategic and military possessions by the time Warwick became its captain during the 1450s

of innocent blood, abuse of the laws, partiality, riot, extortion, murder, rape and vicious living". No less than 130 leading Lancastrians were named, shamed and, in many cases, attainted.

Edward was fully aware of how much he owed to Warwick and the Nevilles, and the earl raked in many precious rewards early on in Edward's reign. The offices and titles showered upon him included great chamberlain of England, warden of the Cinque Ports, constable of Dover Castle, admiral of England and steward of the Duchy of Lancaster. He also received further boosts to his property and land portfolios, including eight manors seized from the Percies in Northumberland, the Westmoreland estates of John Clifford and lands in Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire and the Welsh Marches. Warwick could now rely on an annual income of at least £10,000, an astonishing sum that made him, with the exception of the king, the richest man in England.

In many ways, Warwick proved to be worth the investment. In the aftermath of Towton, Lancastrian resistance flared up in various parts of the realm, notably in Wales, the West Country and, of greatest interest to Warwick, northern England. Over the next four years a dizzying round of raids and risings convulsed the region, with castles like Alnwick and Dunstanburgh routinely passing back and forth between Yorkists and Lancastrians. In his role as warden of the east and west marches

Alnwick Castle, which repeatedly passed back and forth between Lancastrian and Yorkist supporters during the 1460s

Lions of the north

Precise details remain obscure, but the mighty Nevilles most likely traced their origins back to Anglo-Saxon England. Based in County Durham, the family made astute alliances with the post-conquest Norman elite and enhanced their reputation through loyal service to the crown during troubled periods (such as the civil wars of Henry III's reign) and the repeated conflicts with France and Scotland. A Neville, for instance, would be instrumental in the defeat of the Scots at the Battle of Neville's Cross in 1346.

Their estates soon expanded, centred on Raby Castle but extending to Northumberland, Cumbria, Lancashire and beyond. High office arrived too, and Nevilles were to be found as archbishops of York, stewards of the Marches on the Scottish borders and, from 1397, the family gained the title of earls of Westmoreland. The earldoms of Salisbury and Warwick would be secured during the 15th century.

The Nevilles supported Henry of Bolingbroke in his 1399 seizure of the crown from Richard II and, while this brought favour from Henry IV, the family also endured a significant schism between the branches based at Raby and at the other major seat of Middleham.

Though addicted to involvement in national affairs, many of the Nevilles' actions, including their choices of allegiance during the Wars of the Roses, were guided by hostility aimed at their great rivals in the north, the Percy family.

The stone Neville Screen behind the altar at Durham Cathedral, erected in 1380 and a suitably lavish gift from the wealthy family

"Edward was fully aware of how much he owed to Warwick and the Nevilles, and the earl raked in many precious rewards early on in Edward's reign"

Elizabeth Woodville, whose marriage to Edward IV increased tensions between Warwick and the king

Yorkist troops dispatch John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, during the Battle of Northampton, a triumph for Warwick

"A streak of cruelty can also be discerned in Warwick, as witnessed by his treatment of Lancastrian figures after the battle of Northampton"

on the Scottish border, Warwick, along with his brother John Neville, Lord Montagu, played a major role in resisting a Lancastrian resurgence, both through military means and by striving to deter the Scots from supporting Henry and Margaret of Anjou. The process effectively reached completion in May 1464 with the Lancastrian defeat at Hexham. The Nevilles took great pains to obliterate as much of the remaining enemy leadership as possible, with executions being mounted at Newcastle, Middleham Castle (a Neville stronghold) and York.

Many historians have stressed Warwick's dominance during the early years of Edward's reign. Contemporaries sometimes passed similar judgements. One French commentator joked that the English had "but two rulers... Monsieur de Warwick and another whose name I have forgotten". The other, King Edward, was dismissed by Philippe de Commines as "a very young prince, and one of the most beautiful of his age," who indulged in a "voluptuous course of life". De Commines went further, explaining that "as soon as he had overcome all his difficulties, he began to give himself up wholly to pleasures, and took no delight in anything but ladies, dancing, entertainments and other such like effeminate diversions". There was no doubt that "it was the Earl of Warwick who made Edward king".

Despite this account, caution is required. This view of the relationship between Warwick and Edward gained most traction in continental circles, where Warwick appeared particularly influential because of his extensive diplomatic adventures. Edward should not be dismissed as a pawn. It was his decision as much as Warwick's to make a bid for the throne, and his involvement in the business of government was consistent and influential. Indeed, Edward's ability to act independently would become all too clear.

In May 1464, the king married Elizabeth Woodville. The match was kept secret for several months, not least because Edward could anticipate the likely reaction from his counsellors. Elizabeth's social status, while rather lofty in the larger scheme of things, did not quite meet the requirements of a royal bride. When Edward eventually revealed news of his marriage in September, the council, at least according to one Burgundian chronicler, did not conceal their misgivings, telling the king that Elizabeth "was not his match, however good and fair she might be, and he must know well that she was no wife for a prince such as himself". Warwick's opinion can easily be surmised. Back in 1460, during a quarrel with Elizabeth's father, Warwick had asserted that Earl Rivers' "father was but a squire" and that it was "not his part to have the language of lords".

Below: A stone cross marks the location of the Battle of Towton, where the crown was won for Edward IV

Just as importantly, the marriage to Woodville removed the possibility of a more obviously advantageous match with a foreign power. This is precisely what Warwick had been working towards with the French, and Edward's actions made him appear foolish. Warwick may also have resented the fact that Edward had not seen fit to consult him on such a momentous decision. Even so, at first Warwick exhibited no open signs of disenchantment, even accompanying the new queen on her first public appearance at Reading Abbey at Michaelmas in 1464. Cracks did soon begin to show, however.

Warwick became increasingly aggravated by the direction of Edward's foreign policy: the king favoured closer diplomatic ties with the Burgundians, while Warwick wanted to pursue options with the French. Over the coming years, the rising influence of members of the queen's family at court left Warwick feeling increasingly isolated, and the seemingly endless campaign to marry off Elizabeth's female relations undermined Warwick's own familial agenda. With so many suitors being snapped up by the Woodvilles, it became ever harder to locate suitable matches for Warwick's daughters.

The dismissal of Warwick's brother as chancellor in June 1467 only added to Warwick's sense of alienation. He was still far away from any act of outright betrayal though, and he would remain an influential figure right up to the moment of his rebellion (an event covered later in this book). Still, the seeds were already being sown from the mid-1460s, and they would yield dramatic results in the next stage of the Wars of the Roses.

When considering all this and Warwick's career as a whole, it is perhaps best to think of him as a highly talented but incorrigibly opportunistic figure. His decision to ally himself with the Yorkist cause from the 1450s did not sit naturally with family tradition, and the extent of his ambition, and greed, was prodigious. As one contemporary observed, Warwick's "insatiable mind could not be content, and yet before him was there none in England of half the possessions that he had". His military prowess can also be overestimated. His antics in the Channel during the captaincy of Calais were impressive, but on land he was no strategic genius. It is possible that his intervention at the First Battle of St Albans was devised by more seasoned military minds.

A streak of cruelty can also be discerned in Warwick, as witnessed by his treatment of Lancastrian figures after the battle of Northampton and during his efforts to subdue resistance in the north of England in the 1460s. For some though, he was always a brave man: the chronicler Edward Hall wrote of Warwick slaying his horse on one battlefield to demonstrate that he had no intention of fleeing. His talent for self-publicity was also boundless, and the Tudor writer Polydore Vergil concluded that Warwick was "not only marvellously adorned with virtues indeed, but also had a special gift, even from his infancy, in the show and setting forth of the same". His "wit was so ready, and his behaviour so courteous, that he was wonderfully beloved of the people."

Warwick's chaplain, John Rous, would doubtless have agreed, describing his master as "a famous knight and greatly spoken of through the most part of Christendom". It rather depended upon whom you asked, and the nuanced adjudication of the historian Michael Hicks is perhaps more secure. Warwick, Hicks writes, "was certainly remarkable and demands some admiration," but "we do not have to like him".

A young Warwick clad in heavy army, as depicted in the *Rous Roll*

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YORK RULE

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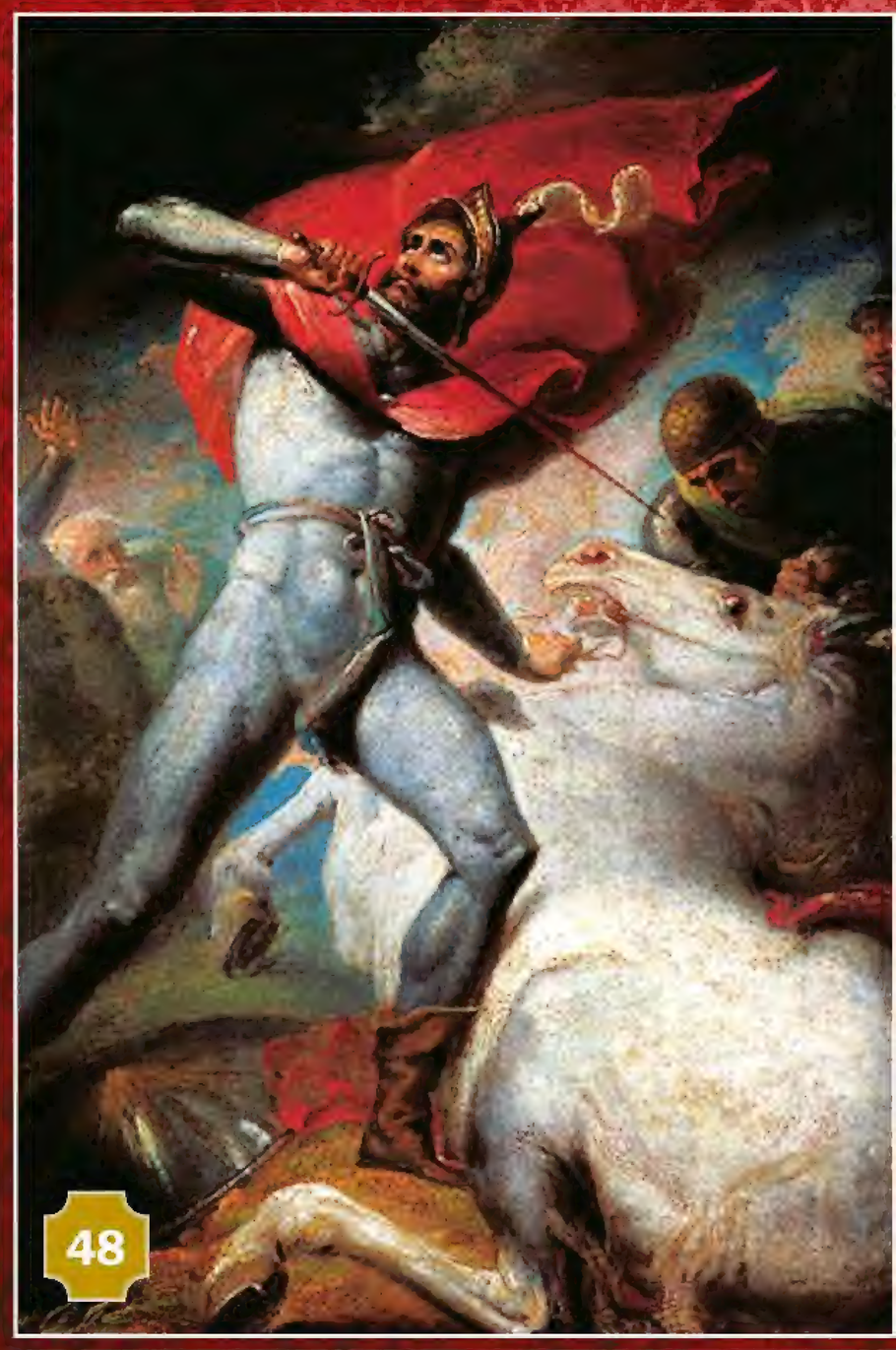
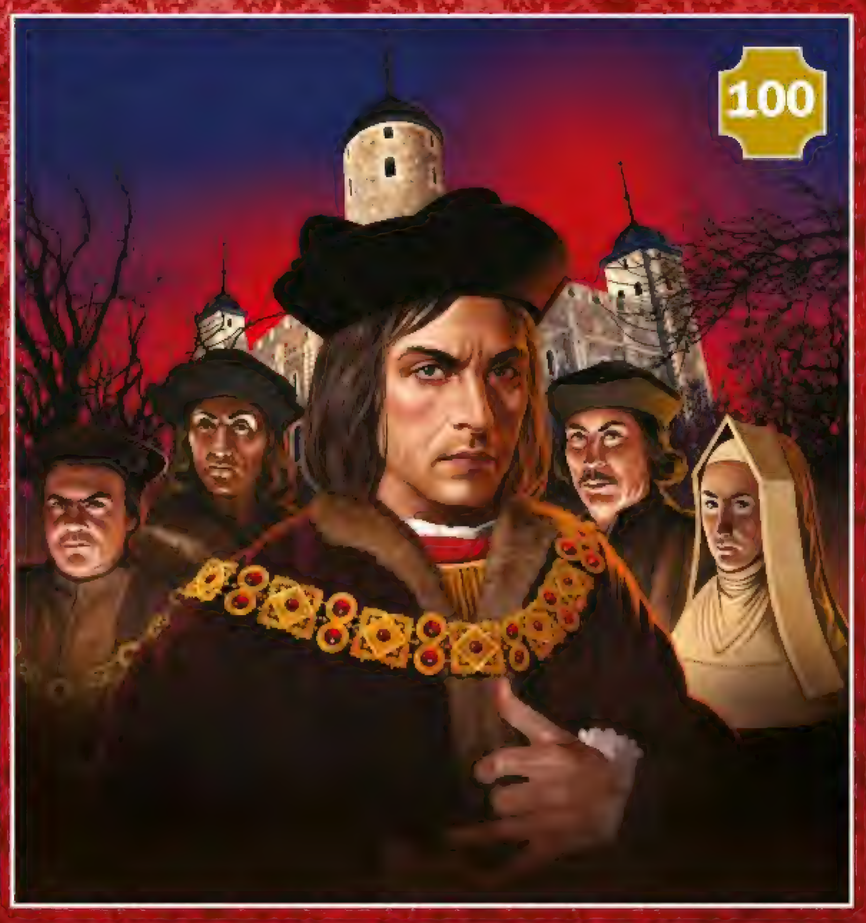
How an unlikely claimant silenced the battle drums at Bosworth to become the king of England

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KEY FIGURES 1461-84

Fueled by ambition, military might and political genius, the House of York's quest to rule England led to one of the famous civil wars in history – but who played key roles in the battles between 1461 and 1484?

Edward IV

ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 40
POLITICAL PROWESS 7/10
MILITARY MIGHT 9/10

Alliance

The eldest surviving son of Richard Plantagenet, Edward inherited his father's dynastic struggle and claim to the throne.

Lifespan

Edward was born in 1442 and died in 1483 of unknown causes, presumed natural.

Political prowess

Edward's likability was helped by his charisma and famous good looks. Although he was known to be rather simple, he managed to maintain a period of peace.

Military might

Edward never lost a battle, winning clash after clash against his Lancastrian foes. However, he also knew when to run away or make peace.

Overview

Edward's defeat of the Lancastrians at Towton exiled King Henry VI and ensured the crown fell to Edward's hands. The Lancastrian challenges to his throne continued but he managed to suppress all of them. His marriage upset the earl of Warwick – and Edward was briefly exiled himself as a result – but he returned to the throne and enjoyed a peaceful and prosperous reign.

Richard of Gloucester

ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 32
POLITICAL PROWESS 8/10
MILITARY MIGHT 7/10

Alliance

Born to Richard, Duke of York, Richard was brother of the first Yorkist King Edward IV.

Lifespan

Richard was born in 1452 and died at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, the last English king to be slain on the battlefield.

Political prowess

Richard was a shrewd and intelligent man. This cunning enabled him to dispose of rivals and fashion his own ascension to the throne.

Military might

Richard was an able military man, but he lost his life at the Battle of Bosworth, during which he was commander of his own army.

Overview

After his brother's death, Richard was made lord protector for Edward V. However, when Edward's sons were declared illegitimate, Richard was crowned king. The two boys subsequently went missing and to this day Richard is suspected to have had them killed. During his short reign he faced a rebellion led by Henry Tudor.

Richard Neville

ALLIANCE YORK & LANCASTER
LIFESPAN 42
POLITICAL PROWESS 10/10
MILITARY MIGHT 6/10

Alliance

The earl of Warwick initially collaborated with Edward IV to dispose of Henry VI but switched sides after Henry's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville.

Lifespan

Born in 1428, Warwick was killed at the Battle of Barnet in 1471 while attempting to flee.

Political prowess

Warwick was influential and his political connections included Europe's most powerful men. His ability to appeal to people's sentiments allowed him to win over those who had previously been his enemies.

Military might

Warwick had a solid reputation as a naval commander but he relied on traditional strategies on the battlefield that ultimately saw him outmanoeuvred.

Overview

He was known as the Kingmaker for good reason. Originally a supporter of Henry VI, a territorial dispute prompted him to switch sides. Warwick's assistance put Edward IV on the throne but the partnership did not last long. Warwick rebelled and returned to the Lancastrian cause, briefly helping to restore Henry VI.

Edward of Westminster

ALLIANCE LANCASTER
LIFESPAN 17
POLITICAL PROWESS 2/10
MILITARY MIGHT 4/10

Alliance
Edward was the only son of Lancastrian king Henry VI of England and heir to the throne.

Lifespan
Born in 1453, Edward was killed at the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471 - the only heir apparent to the throne to die in battle.

Political prowess
Edward died but he learned well from his mother and possessed a brutal streak.

Military might
Spending much of his life in exile, Edward did not have much battlefield experience. He showed some skill but his demise never saw this realised.

Overview
Edward was born the heir of Henry VI but when the boy was only seven his father was captured and so Edward disinherited the throne. Edward and his mother, Margaret of Anjou, fled to exile in France. When Edward IV was disposed, the hot-headed prince returned to England to stop him reclaiming the throne at the Battle of Tewkesbury but was defeated.

Margaret of York

ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 57
POLITICAL PROWESS 9/10
MILITARY MIGHT 6/10

Alliance
Daughter of Richard Plantagenet, Margaret was the sister of the two Yorkist kings, Edward IV and Richard III.

Lifespan
Born in 1446, she died in 1503.

Political prowess
Margaret was an intelligent woman, watching events unfold from afar and using her position of power to influence. Rather than being used as a pawn - the fate of most women - she proved to be an invaluable ruler of Burgundy.

Military might
Margaret never participated in battle but she was skilled at raising money and men for the wars fought by her husband.

Overview
Margaret, unusually, remained unwed until she was 22 years old. This was due to her position as a powerful bargaining chip for the House of York. Her eventual marriage to Charles the Bold provided Edward IV with valuable support against Warwick.

Jacquetta of Luxembourg

ALLIANCE LANCASTER & YORK
LIFESPAN C. 55-57
POLITICAL PROWESS 9/10
MILITARY MIGHT 1/10

Alliance
Initially married to the brother of King Henry V, Jacquetta was a firm Lancastrian. However, after their defeat she switched to York.

Lifespan
Born around 1415, she died in 1472 of natural causes.

Political prowess
Jacquetta made some rash moves in her youth but she was cunning enough to know when to switch sides. Her family became one of the most powerful in the English court.

Military might
As a woman, Jacquetta never saw military action herself, preferring to act behind the scenes at court.

Overview
Jacquetta married the brother of Henry V, but when he died she wed Richard Woodville, a minor squire. This upset Henry VI and the couple had to pay a fine before they were welcomed back to court. When the Lancastrians looked to be defeated, she changed sides and her daughter was married to Edward IV. When Edward was exiled, Jacquetta was accused of witchcraft, an allegation that was only lifted upon the king's return.

Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham

ALLIANCE YORK & TUDOR
LIFESPAN 29
POLITICAL PROWESS 6/10
MILITARY MIGHT 3/10

Alliance
Buckingham was a ward of Edward IV and married Catherine Woodville. He later led a rebellion in Henry Tudor's name against Richard III.

Lifespan
Henry was born 1454 and died in 1483. He was executed for treason by beheading.

Political prowess
Before rebelling, Buckingham was Richard's most enthusiastic supporter and many chroniclers believe it was his speeches and political manoeuvres that drummed up support for Richard.

Military might
He was able to assemble a considerable force during his rebellion but they were swiftly defeated by Richard.

Overview
From an early age, Buckingham was allied to the Yorkist cause. He was Richard III's closest ally and an enthusiastic supporter of his claim to the crown. For reasons unknown, however, he joined a rebellion against Richard in 1483. Although the rebellion was a disaster, it did drive many people to deflect to Henry Tudor's camp.

George, Duke of Clarence

ALLIANCE YORK & LANCASTER
LIFESPAN 28
POLITICAL PROWESS 2/10
MILITARY MIGHT 4/10

Alliance
Clarence was the brother of Edward IV and Richard III. He briefly switched sides to support the Lancastrian claim.

Lifespan
Born in 1449, he died in 1478 when he was executed for treason at the Tower of London.

Political prowess
He was easily manipulated, too trusting and his errors in judgment led him to scheme against his own brother not once but twice, leading to his downfall.

Military might
Clarence fought with his brother in both the Battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury, proving himself to be a capable foe on the field.

Overview
Upon Edward IV's ascension to the throne, Clarence was made lord lieutenant in Ireland. He soon fell under the influence of the earl of Warwick, supporting an uprising against his brother and helpeing put Henry VI back on the throne. Clarence eventually reconciled with his brother. Old habits die hard, however, and Clarence began scheming against his brother again, leading to him being executed for treason.

© Getty

Battles & Bloodshed 1461-1484

After Edward IV's overwhelming victory against the Lancastrians, the battles of the Wars of the Roses continued under Yorkist rule

Written by William E Welsh

Mortimer's Cross
2 February 1461
Yorkist

Edward, Earl of March, intercepted a Lancastrian army in Herefordshire preparing to march on London and free King Henry VI from captivity. Jasper Tudor, Duke of Bedford, James Butler, Earl of Wiltshire, and Owen Tudor (Bedford's father) each commanded a Lancastrian unit. Although Wiltshire's mercenaries routed the Yorkist left wing, the Yorkists under Edward and Sir William Herbert prevailed against Pembroke's Welsh troops. Sensing a Yorkist victory, the Lancastrian army fled the field.

Second battle of St Albans
17 February 1461
Lancastrian

Queen Margaret's Lancastrian army, led by Henry Beaufort, 3rd Duke of Somerset, attacked the Yorkist army of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick at St Albans. Warwick had established a strong defensive position bristling with archers, handgunners and artillery, but inclement weather extinguished handgun matches and rendered the arrow barrages ineffectual. The Lancastrians successfully stormed the field fortifications and rolled up Warwick's left flank. Henry VI was freed from Yorkist captivity.

Ferrybridge
27-28 March 1461
Yorkist

Edward, Earl of March, awaited reinforcements in Yorkshire before doing battle with the Lancastrians regrouping in the north. Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, established a bridgehead on 27 March on the north bank of the River Aire for the Yorkist forces marching to join Edward. Lancastrian lords John Clifford and John Neville drove the Yorkists back across the river the following morning. Later that day, Yorkist mounted archers crossed upstream, outflanking the Lancastrians and slaying Lord Clifford.

Towton
29 March 1461
Yorkist

A storm of arrows by Yorkist archers goaded the Lancastrians into a headlong attack. After six hours of combat, John de Mowbray, 3rd Duke of Norfolk, arrived with Yorkist reinforcements. His men crushed the left flank of the Duke of Somerset's Lancastrian army. The Lancastrians fled towards the flooded River Cock only to be cut down in large numbers in a meadow by pursuing Yorkist cavalry. Edward IV was subsequently crowned in London on 28 June.

Hedgeley Moor
25 April 1464
Yorkist

John Neville, Lord Montagu, led a Yorkist army into Northumberland to clear Lancastrian forces led by Henry Beaufort, 3rd Duke of Somerset, from northeastern England. Following an inconclusive archery duel, the left wing of the Lancastrian army fled the field before the two sides made contact. Montagu's army then fell upon the remaining Lancastrians. Heavily outnumbered, most of the remaining Lancastrians fled. However, Sir Ralph Percy's troops held their ground only to be slaughtered.

Hexham
15 May 1464
Yorkist

The Lancastrians continued to pose a threat in the north by fomenting a Lancastrian uprising. John Neville, Lord Montagu, launched a surprise attack on their camp near the Devil's Water, a tributary of the River Tyne. Henry Beaufort, 3rd Duke of Somerset, hurriedly deployed his inferior forces in a field with his back to the Devil's Water. A downhill charge by the Yorkists shattered the Lancastrian line and pushed the Lancastrians into the stream. Somerset was captured in a barn and beheaded the same day.

Edgecote Moor
26 July 1469
Rebel Yorkists (later Lancastrians)

A Yorkist rebel army led by Robin of Redesdale encountered Yorkist royal forces under William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and Humphrey Stafford, 1st Earl of Devon, in Oxfordshire. On the morning of the battle Redesdale inflicted substantial losses on Pembroke's Welsh footsoldiers. Devon, encamped with his archers in a separate location, failed to reinforce Pembroke. When the vanguard of the Earl of Warwick's army arrived, the reinforced rebel army completed the rout of Pembroke's forces.

Losecote Field
12 March 1470
Yorkist

Robert Welles' rebels planned to join forces with traitors Earl of Warwick and George Plantagenet, Duke of Clarence, at Leicester, but at the last minute they lost heart. King Edward IV overtook the rebels near Empingham. The rebels formed up with shouts of 'a Warwick!' and 'a Clarence!', yet they were unable to stand up to a charge by the royal troops. Collapsing in the face of the onslaught, the rebels fled for their lives, flinging off jackets bearing the livery of Warwick and Clarence.

Barnet
14 April 1471
Yorkist

King Edward IV intercepted the Lancastrian army of former ally Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, as it marched southward to London. In the initial fighting both right wings succeeded against the opposing left wings. The Lancastrian right rallied and returned to the fight, but in the fog it inadvertently attacked the Lancastrian centre. Edward took advantage of the confusion and committed his reserve. The Yorkists drove the Lancastrians from the field. Warwick was cut down in the blood-letting that quickly ensued.

Tewkesbury
4 May 1471
Yorkist

Queen Margaret's Lancastrian army, led by Edmund Beaufort, 4th Duke of Somerset, was overtaken by Edward IV's Yorkist royal army in Gloucestershire. The Lancastrians launched a surprise flank attack against the Yorkist left wing, but Richard Plantagenet, Duke of Gloucester, successfully checked the assault. After softening the enemy line with arrows and shot, Edward attacked and routed the Lancastrians. Somerset was executed, Margaret driven into exile and Henry VI imprisoned in the Tower of London.

SCOTLAND
Lancastrian victory
Yorkist victory
Tudor victory
Hedgeley Moor
Hexham
Towton
YORK
Ferrybridge
Wakefield
Blore Heath
Stoke
Losecote Field
WALES
Bosworth
Ludford Bridge
Mortimer's Cross
Edgecote Moor
Northampton
St Albans
Tewkesbury
Barnet
LONDON
ENGLAND

EDWARD IV
VICTORY AT TOWTON

How the Lancastrians were crushed by the passionate young king's brute force at the Battle of Towton

Written by Derek Wilson

On 29 March 1461, an impressive phenomenon appeared on the English political scene. England's new king, a remarkably tall young man (almost two metres in height), not yet 19 years old, led an army across the snow-swept Yorkshire uplands to make good his claim and overthrow his predecessor. He was about to win the bloodiest battle fought on English soil – a victory that would mark him out as the strong, charismatic leader the nation needed. Almost exactly 22 years later, this same king, now overweight and weakened by self-indulgence, died. He was only 40. If we seek an explanation for this transformation it lies in one word: passion. Edward IV was not only tall of stature, he was 'big' in every way – extrovert, generous, enthusiastic; a man who enjoyed life to the full. He was far from being unintelligent and he brought his realm a measure of peace and stability after years of chaos. But, for all that, he was a flawed, a man whose passion could obscure his judgement. When it came to a conflict between head and heart, his heart usually won. This made him a charismatic leader on the battlefield, but it would eventually come close to destroying all he had achieved.

Edward's entrance at the Battle of Towton provides a dramatic example of his character. He arrived as a man with a price on his head, a rebel against Henry VI and

only referred to by his title of Earl of March. He arrived with points to be made and deaths to be avenged. Everyone on that frozen battlefield - friends and foes alike - was asking the same question: 'How would young Edward acquit himself in this first trial of strength?'

The root of the nation's problems was the weak rule of Henry VI, a vacillating and mentally unstable king whose power was propped up by his queen, Margaret of Anjou, and a coterie of Lancastrian nobles. Over the previous 40 years the English had seen their position in Europe gradually collapse. They had lost virtually all the continental territory ruled by earlier English kings and had seen their claim to the throne of France successfully challenged. Disorder at home was added to humiliation abroad. The man who had taken up the challenge of rescuing the nation from this ineffective regime was Richard, Duke of York. In 1454, parliament appointed him protector of the king and defender of the realm. Margaret was determined to balk Richard's ambition and the next few years witnessed the fortunes of the Lancastrian and Yorkist factions swing back and forth. The Wars of the Roses had begun. After decisively beating Margaret's army at the Battle of Northampton in July 1460, Richard took the king prisoner and installed him in honourable confinement in the Tower of London. He used this position of strength to impose an agreement with the opposition: he would support the king on the condition the crown reverted to him on Henry's death. But Margaret had an infant son and was determined not to give up his birthright. She continued to intrigue and campaign against the protector, primarily in the north of England.

By the beginning of December 1460, Richard, secure in the capital, realised he would have to march north to deal with the Lancastrian threat. He sent his eldest son, Edward, Earl of March, to the Welsh border to root out pockets of resistance there while he and his second son, Edmund, Earl of Rutland, hurried to Yorkshire to confront the main Lancastrian army. He established his headquarters in his castle at Sandal, near Wakefield. Unfortunately, he underestimated the size of the enemy host and, in the ensuing battle, he and Edmund were either killed in the fray or captured and executed. Their heads were displayed at York over the Micklegate Bar, Richard's adorned with a paper crown.

We can scarcely imagine how Edward felt on receiving the news but, true to form, he did not fail to respond. The first Lancastrians to feel his fury were Welsh and French mercenary combatants under the leadership of Owen Tudor. Edward met them at Mortimer's Cross, near Leominster on 2 February 1461. Before the battle, the troops were amazed and apprehensive to see the rare atmospheric event known as a parhelion, in which the Sun appeared to be accompanied by two companion lights. Edward seized upon this phenomenon and turned it to his advantage, telling his men the parhelion represented the Holy Trinity, who were smiling upon his enterprise. From that time on, Edward used the 'sun in splendour' as his personal emblem. He and his men routed the enemy, before setting out for London.

Edward's Lancastrian rival, King Henry VI, depicted here in 1540 by an unknown painter

"The scene could not have been better set for Edward to claim the throne. He grabbed his opportunity"

A copy of a 15th-century portrait of Edward IV

Meanwhile, Margaret had been touting for support in Scotland and was on her way south with a locust horde of Scottish and English supporters, living off the land and terrorising everyone in their wake. They turned the tables once again by winning a victory at the Second Battle of St Albans and rescuing Henry VI. However, when Margaret reached London, she found the gates locked against her. The citizens were terrified of what she and her ravaging army would do in the capital and they had received messages from Edward saying that he was coming to their aid. He arrived on 26 February to a warm welcome. The scene could not have been better set for Edward to claim the throne. On 3 March, he summoned a council of leading magnates and parliamentarians and claimed the crown by right on the basis that Henry had forfeited his right by breaking the recent agreement. The next day, he went to Westminster Hall, took his seat on the royal throne and was enthusiastically acclaimed as Edward IV. Although the Lancastrian king was not without his supporters in the city, most of the people recognised in the robust 19-year-old giant someone who actually looked like a king, and they welcomed him enthusiastically. There was now just the small matter of Margaret and her host to deal with.

Margaret of Anjou, consort to Henry VI, places a paper crown on the decapitated head of Richard, Duke of York

The new king lost no time in heading north for what he hoped would be the final showdown. He knew that he would be fighting the Lancastrians on their own ground. The only sound strategy was to confront them as soon as possible, before they had time to gather all their strength.

By 13 March, he had left the capital, having sent on ahead Warwick with part of the army including a contingent provided by the grateful Londoners. Margaret and her husband had taken up residence in York and dispatched their army, under the leadership of the Duke of Somerset, the Earl of Northumberland and Lord Clifford to face the Yorkists. Their superior force marched out and crossed the River Wharfe at Tadcaster, their objective being to make the Yorkists do battle on the open furrowed farmland plateau beyond. They posted a contingent at Ferrybridge where the Great North Road crossed the River Aire, aiming to impede the progress of the enemy.

Edward, with the bulk of his army, coming up the road from London, halted at Pontefract and sent a force to take control of Ferrybridge. Here the fighting raged back and forth, the Lancastrians at first losing, then retaking, this strategic place. Edward eventually thwarted this strategy by sending a force under the veteran William Neville,

Henry VI's coronation as King of France illuminated in Anciennes Chroniques D'Angleterre

Lord Fauconberg directing soldiers during the Battle of Towton. Initially allied to the House of Lancaster, Fauconberg's allegiance shifted to York during Henry VI's second bout of madness

Lord Fauconberg, to cross the Aire higher up at Castleford and take the Ferrybridge defenders from the rear, forcing them to fall back to rejoin the main Lancastrian army. During this action, Lord Clifford was killed. Thus, on 28 March, both hosts were moving towards the place appointed by fate for their final encounter.

The next day was Palm Sunday, when Christians remembered the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, but there was nothing 'meek and mild' about the approach of the opposing English armies, which marched across the frozen plough-ruts on that holy day in 1461. If we want to understand something of how fellow countrymen could set aside all considerations of humanity and compassion, throwing themselves on each other in hate-filled frenzy, we might perhaps consider current events in Syria. As has often been observed, there are few kinds of warfare more violent than civil war.

The Lancastrians, led by the Duke of Somerset and the Earl of Northumberland, definitely had the advantage. Their numbers were larger and they chose the site. It is impossible, five and a half centuries later, to calculate the numbers of men engaged on both sides. Scant contemporary accounts suggest that the two armies consisted of more than 50,000 men, more than half of whom were killed in the fray. Historians are dubious about the figures but there is no doubting the fact that this was the biggest armed conflict ever recorded on English soil.

Edward was hurried into the battle before his numbers were complete. He was still waiting for the arrival of a contingent led by the Duke of Norfolk. The battle ground was a level place south of Towton, close to the Great North Road. It was bordered to the east by marshy ground and to the west by a wooded slope falling steeply to Cock Beck, a watercourse currently in spate. These boundaries meant that any soldiers trying to flee the area would have a very difficult time of it.

> "Flexing their frost-numbed fingers against the bowstrings, they fired volleys of arrows"

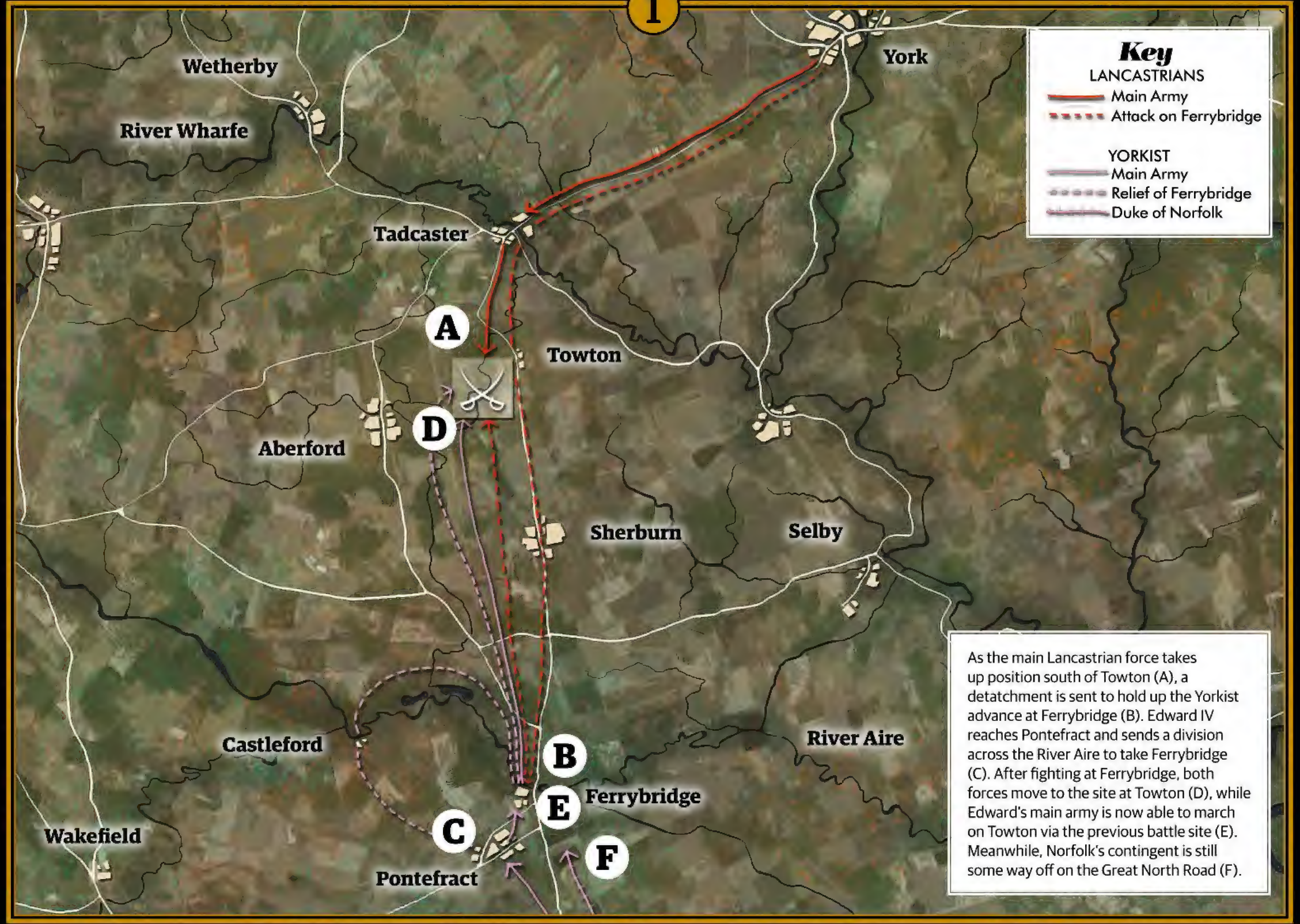
The one factor the Lancastrians could not control was the weather. As day broke on a bitterly cold morning, it began to snow. Having taken up their defensive position, the Lancastrian troops found themselves peering through the flurries, trying to make out Edward's men as they climbed the southern slope and emerged onto the plateau. What made matters doubly difficult for the defenders was that the wind was blowing from the south in their faces. This also had the effect of shortening the range of their archers while, at the same time, carrying the arrows of the opposing bowmen several metres farther. Details of the battle are scant, but we know that the archers of both sides began the action. Flexing their frost-numbed fingers against the bowstrings, they fired volleys of arrows at the enemy. The objective was to deplete the ranks of their opponents in preparation for the hand-to-hand contest between the men-at-arms that would follow. Lord Fauconberg was quick to see the advantage the weather had given. He ordered his bowmen to advance a few paces, fire their arrows, then retreat. The impact was devastating, as the swarm of Yorkist missiles rushed down out of the blinding snow. The Lancastrian return fire fell short and did little or no damage. Several times King Edward's men were able to repeat the manoeuvre and were even able to replenish their own arrows from the Lancastrian shafts littering the ground. One intriguing recent archaeological discovery at the battlefield site is some handgun shot. Might it be that the Battle of Towton saw the first appearance of military handguns in Britain?

Sustaining heavy losses without engaging the enemy forced Somerset to initiate the next stage of the action. According to a contemporary chronicler, Jean de Wavrin, the Lancastrian commander sent a detachment via the woods on the western flank of the battlefield to attack the Yorkist left. If this happened (and some historians are sceptical about it), then it was probably only intended as a diversionary tactic. Wavrin describes the Yorkist ranks on the left being thrown into confusion until Edward personally rode into their midst and put fresh heart into them. Certainly, the tactic did not affect the general drift of the battle. The Lancastrians were forced to leave their defensive position. Somerset and Northumberland

Battle of Towton

29 March 1461

1

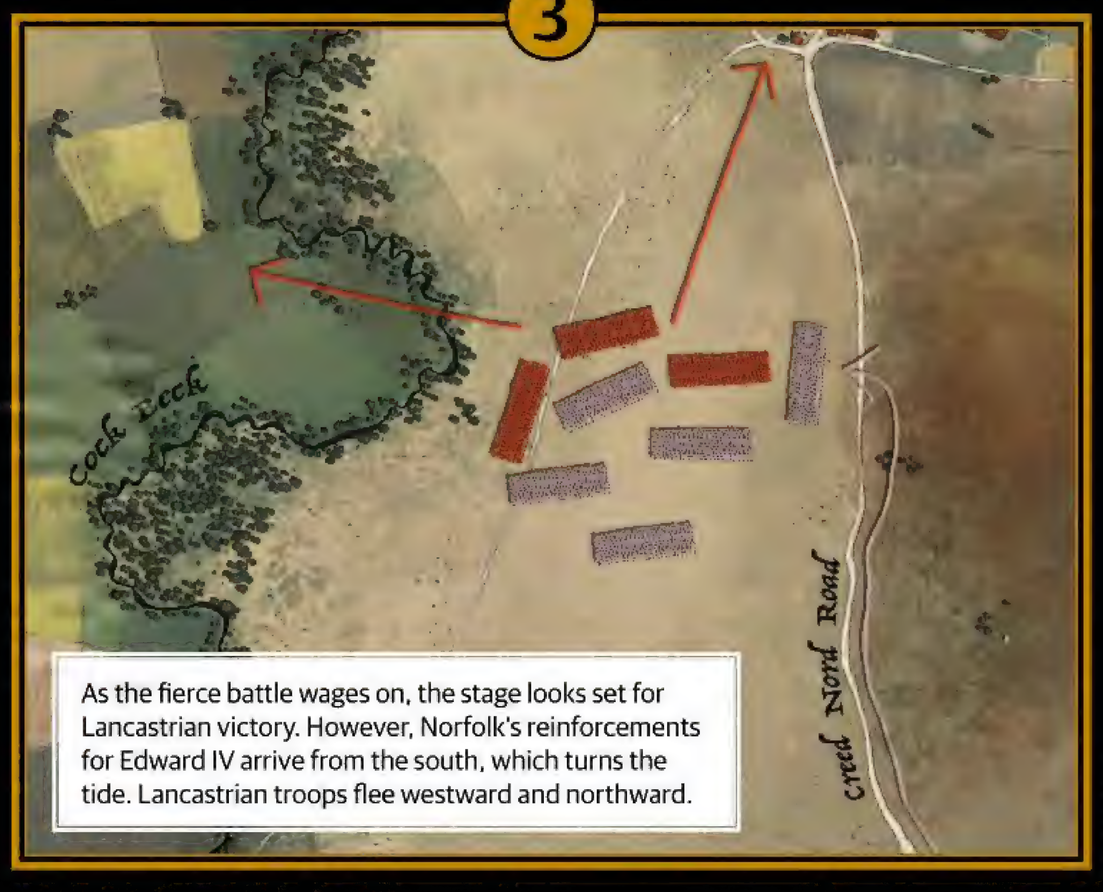


As the main Lancastrian force takes up position south of Towton (A), a detatchment is sent to hold up the Yorkist advance at Ferrybridge (B). Edward IV reaches Pontefract and sends a division across the River Aire to take Ferrybridge (C). After fighting at Ferrybridge, both forces move to the site at Towton (D), while Edward's main army is now able to march on Towton via the previous battle site (E). Meanwhile, Norfolk's contingent is still some way off on the Great North Road (F).

2

Surrounded on the right by marshy land and a steep slope on the left to Cock Beck, Somerset's division of the Lancastrian troops may have attempted a flanking manouvre for concealment.

3



As the fierce battle wages on, the stage looks set for Lancastrian victory. However, Norfolk's reinforcements for Edward IV arrive from the south, which turns the tide. Lancastrian troops flee westward and northward.

© Rocio Espin

The meadow in which the Battle of Towton took place

"Edward rode back and forth, encouraging his followers and deterring any who tried to run from the fray"

threw their cavalry across the open ground. They were somewhat hampered by the prickly carpet of strewn arrows. Edward's men withstood the charge. The Lancastrians followed it up with their ranks of foot soldiers.

Now the battle began in earnest. Men-at-arms fell to hand-to-hand fighting, thrusting, slashing and hacking with swords, halberds and bills. It was a battle of attrition. Armoured men clashed with each other, stumbling over the bodies of dead and wounded. For hour after exhausting hour the fighting went on. Success or failure became a matter of endurance and endurance depended largely on numbers. The Lancastrians were able to call up fresh soldiers from their reserves to fill the gaps in their ranks. Edward rode back and forth, encouraging his followers and deterring any who tried to run from the fray. But his left wing was being pushed towards the edge of the plateau and the steep slope down to Cock Beck.

Then, at last, the Duke of Norfolk appeared from the London road leading 5,000 fresh troops. Their physical presence and their impact on Yorkist morale turned near defeat into victory. Facing the enemy on two fronts, the Lancastrians faltered, then crumbled. In twos and threes, then in 20s and 30s they threw aside their cumbersome weapons and retreated, some in the direction of Towton, others down the slippery incline towards the beck. Their whooping foes followed, cutting them down as they ran in their restricting armour. That same armour weighed down those who tried to cross the river. They stumbled and fell in the water, only to be pressed down by their desperate colleagues who used them as a human bridge to reach the far side. Soon Cock Beck was incarnadine with the blood of the slain. Those running northwards fared little better. They had to make for Tadcaster, where the road to York crossed the River Wharfe. When Somerset reached it, he ordered the bridge to be destroyed in order to stop the pursuing Yorkists reaching the place where Henry and Margaret lodged. By this act he condemned many of his own men to being trapped on the wrong side of the river. This area now became another killing field.

Just how long the Battle of Towton lasted and what its cost was in human lives are subjects still much debated. According to research by English Heritage, the actual clash of arms went on for three hours. If we include the pursuit, we must think in terms of the carnage going on much longer perhaps until nightfall. Only darkness gave survivors a reasonable chance of putting distance between themselves and Towton Field.

15th-century chroniclers put the death toll at between 28,000 and 38,000 but this is more likely to reflect the horrified reaction of writers than careful analysis. What cannot be denied is that Towton field witnessed the worst of English Medieval warfare. The Wharfe and the Cock Beck ran red with blood and the escape route northwards was a corridor some six miles long and half a mile wide marked out by scattered bodies. Recent excavation of a mass burial pit has revealed just how terribly many Lancastrians died.

An 1812 interpretation of English archers during the reign of King Edward IV

Their heads and limbs were brutally hacked, with unnecessary, gratuitous violence. These victims had been felled with animal savagery by soldiers whose blood lust had been roused by enduring a gruelling and fearsome combat that lasted several hours.

What gave the Yorkists the victory? Good leadership by seasoned campaigners of the stature of the Earl of Warwick, the Duke of Norfolk and Lord Fauconberg. The timely arrival of reinforcements was vital. But another factor was the inspiring presence of Edward IV. Here was a young king, in the midst of the fray, riding among his men who could see the royal banner, even if they could not glimpse the king himself. Here was a warrior king, in the mould of Henry V; a real king; the sort of king England needed after decades of ineffective rule.

The contemporary *Gregory's Chronicle* provides fragments of gruesome detail about the aftermath of the Battle of Towton: "The Earl of Devonshire was sick and might not escape away and was taken and beheaded. And the Earl of Wiltshire

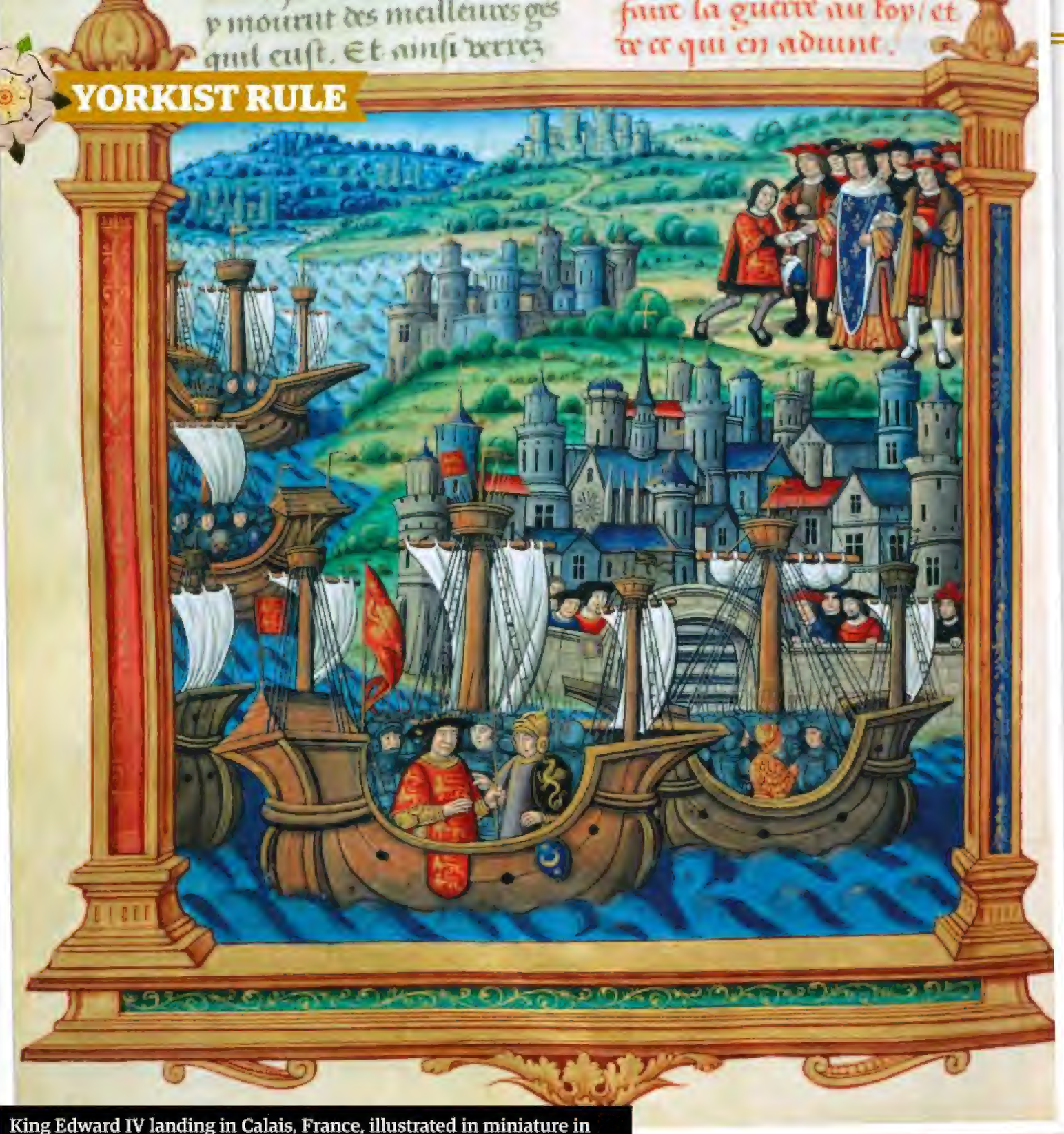
Rose Noble coin of Edward IV, minted in 1464

The birth of culture

Inspired by the court across the Channel, Edward IV encouraged the arts when he returned to England

The months Edward spent out of England were formative in that they fed some of his other passions. As Henry VI and Queen Margaret were supported by Louis XI of France, he turned to the French king's arch-enemy (and his own brother-in-law), Charles the Bold of Burgundy. Charles was a major patron of the arts, and under his rule, what we call the Northern Renaissance flourished. Some of Europe's finest painters, sculptors, manuscript illuminators and musicians were attracted to the Burgundian court. The wealth generated by Netherlandish merchants encouraged a variety of other crafts – tapestry makers, armourers, goldsmiths and tailors. Society's leaders sumptuously adorned their mansions and themselves in the latest fashions. The phrase 'conspicuous consumption' well describes Charles the Bold's elite. What Edward saw during his brief exile showed up the cultural poverty of English court life and inspired his own sensuality. He resolved that his household, when he regained the crown, would reflect not just royal power but taste, refinement and splendour. Once he had established Yorkist rule after the Battle of Tewkesbury, he achieved this ambition.

Within a few years, a foreign visitor could describe the court presided over by Edward and his queen as "the most splendid in all Christendom". From the Low Countries they commissioned beautiful clothes, jewellery and furnishings. At Windsor, the King expanded the plans for St George's Chapel, causing it to be built in the latest perpendicular style. But Edward's dominant passion was for books and illuminated manuscripts. He ordered several volumes from leading craftsmen across the continent. One was Jean Wavrin's *Anciennes Et Nouvelles Chroniques D'Angleterre*, a complete history of the kingdom up to 1471. Biographies and chronicles of great past rulers were of particular interest, but they served another purpose: they appealed to Edward's love of luxury.



King Edward IV landing in Calais, France, illustrated in miniature in the memoirs of Philippe de Commyne, a French writer and diplomat

involve military action. The king preferred to win over potential trouble makers by magnanimous displays of forgiveness. In this way he made some disastrous mistakes. The worst was his generous pardon and rehabilitation of Margaret's general, the Duke of Somerset, who took the first opportunity to return to his old allegiance.

The charismatic hero of Towton held onto his crown for a decade. He achieved the distinction of never having lost a battle. However, several of the Yorkist victories were won by Edward's generals and not by the king in person. By the middle of 1465, any real resistance had been crushed.

Unfortunately, the young king was beginning to alienate some of his own supporters. He was losing respect because he was more effective in dealing with his enemies than in holding in check his own passions. With peace and ease came decadence. Edward refused to listen to advice from older and wiser councillors. Men who had fought for the king in bloody battles particularly resented his marriage to a woman of low rank, Elizabeth Woodville, to whose family he now showed those marks of favour they believed to be theirs by right. Several of England's magnates resented the 'effete' life of the royal court, which was marked by pleasure seeking, bordering on debauchery. At last Edward's staunch ally, the Earl of Warwick, was driven to transfer his allegiance to the old king. In September 1470, the tables were turned. Now it was Edward who had to go into

An etching depicting Margaret of Anjou

"The young king was, by then, beginning to alienate some of his own supporters"

was taken and brought to Newcastle to the king and there his head was smitten off and sent unto London to be set upon London Bridge... The king tarried in the North a great while and made great enquiries of the rebellions against his father, and took down his father's head from the wall of York and made all the country to be sworn unto him and unto his laws."

Yet, astonishing as it may seem, this crushing defeat did not mark the end of Lancastrian ambitions. As long as Henry's indomitable queen was able to wield influence, as long as she had a son with a claim to the throne, as long as there were nobles who had linked their fortunes to the Lancastrian cause and could not or would not forsake Margaret and her witless husband, so long would Edward IV have to be on the watch for rebellion. As soon as he returned to London, his coronation was held. Soon afterwards, parliament proclaimed Henry and his supporters traitors. The ex-king took refuge in Scotland. His wife negotiated with James II of Scotland and Louis XI of France to provide aid in return for handing over Berwick and Calais respectively. This unsettled the border region and obliged Edward to return thither in 1464. In fact, the king spent many months on the move around England neutralising lingering Lancastrian sympathies. This did not always

exile. Once more Henry VI was King of England (though effective power was in Warwick's hands). The Battle of Towton, it seemed, had been in vain.

As it happened, Edward was out of the country for only six months. He returned in March 1471 and, within a few weeks, had defeated his enemies decisively. Henry VI and his son were killed. The last dozen years of Edward's reign were relatively tranquil and England benefited from a welcome period of peace. But old resentments lingered and even affected the king's brothers. Edward found it necessary to have George, Duke of Clarence, executed after finding him guilty of plotting against him. Richard of Gloucester survived but, immediately after the king's death, manoeuvred to replace his son and heir, Edward V. One stratagem Richard used was fostering the rumour that the boy and his brother were bastards, because Edward's marriage was invalid. The king, it was claimed, had entered into a previous union with another lady who was officially still his wife. Whether true or not, the story was easily believed by those who knew Edward IV and his passionate nature. If there is a moral to be drawn from a reign that started dramatically well at Towton, only to end by undermining the Yorkist dynasty, perhaps it is that anyone who aspires to rule over others needs, first of all, to be in command of himself.

A 1902 illustration of Edward IV's coronation ceremony

© Alamy, Getty Images, TopFoto

THE WHITE QUEEN'S BLACK MAGIC

Was witchcraft behind the fairy-tale marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville?

Written by Willow Winsham

The Spring day in 1464 was bright and fair as Edward IV, England's first Yorkist king, rode with the hunt in Whittlebury Forest. Whether his thoughts lay on his quarry, the weather or the tumultuous times that had brought him the crown, they were soon to be caught by another matter entirely. For there, standing beneath an oak tree, stood the most beautiful of women, a small boy clutching each hand as she watched him approach. Without hesitation she threw herself into his path, pleading with the king to intercede in a matter that would restore the dower lands that were rightly hers and keep her small family from poverty. In that moment the king was struck, not by the earthly arrow of the hunt, but by the arrow of love; a spell from which he would never be released.

That he wanted her there and then there was no question, and none other had before now resisted the handsome young monarch. He could not, however, persuade the vision of loveliness to concede so much as a kiss, and, when there was talk of taking what he desired by force, her protestations regarding her virtue and her honour so shamed the king that he fell on bended knee before her, swearing instead eternal devotion.

The rest of the story is equally well known; so besotted was the king that he proposed marriage, and the pair

ELIZABETH WOODVILLE
ÆTAT. SVÆ
ANNO DOM

were married in secret a short while later, much to the shock and consternation of the king's council and subjects alike when the fact was finally revealed in September of that year.

So goes the popular legend of how the charismatic and womanising king Edward IV met, married and bedded the alluring Elizabeth Woodville, the woman for whom he was willing to give everything. The legend has been greatly embroidered and added to over the centuries, but one tantalising question always remains: what was it that made Edward so ready to risk both earthly and heavenly condemnation in order to make Elizabeth his? The answer, according to one theory, is simple: Edward's commoner queen snared and held her man not just through womanly wiles alone, but through the more sinister and assured method of witchcraft.

Edward IV, imagined after his death by an anonymous artist

The first rumblings of this accusation came in 1469 and did not involve Elizabeth directly, but her mother, Jacquetta, the former Duchess of Bedford. It was a perilous time for the family; Jacquetta's husband and son had been summarily executed on the orders of Edward, Earl of Warwick, of Kingmaker fame, while Elizabeth and her children were uncertain as to their own future safety. Edward IV himself could offer no help, held prisoner by Warwick, the man who had helped put him on the throne. In the midst of this turmoil, a man named Thomas Wake came forward to accuse Jacquetta Woodville of witchcraft. He had in his possession an image in lead; shaped in the form of a man it had, he insisted, been made by Jacquetta for nefarious purposes. Another man, a parish clerk named John Daunger, also came forward at Wake's bidding, corroborating the fact that Jacquetta had also made two further images, one each of the king and queen. The implication was obvious: Elizabeth's mother had used the images and her magical knowledge to bind the king to her daughter in an unnatural fashion.

An illuminated manuscript shows the marriage of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville, from the *Anciennes Chroniques D'Angleterre* by Jean de Wavrin

Two witches add ingredients to their cauldron in this 1489 woodcut from Germany

Jacquetta was arrested and taken to Warwick Castle. The entire matter stank of political intrigue and manipulation; Wake was, conveniently, a staunch supporter of Warwick. They had trifled with the wrong woman, however – Jacquetta called on the support of the mayor of London and others with influence, and although the captive Edward was forced to call witnesses against his mother-in-law, the case swiftly fell apart when the king was once more his own person in January 1470. Determined to clear her name, Jacquetta

accused Wake before the King's council of having malicious intentions towards her and, in face of her spirited defence, was acquitted, the fact made part of the public record as agreed by the king and council, which included Warwick.

Any further connection between the Woodville family and witchcraft remained the stuff of

"Determined to clear her name, Jacquetta accused Wake before the King's council"

An engraving of Elizabeth, published in Mary Howitt's *Biographical Sketches Of The Queens Of England*

whispers and rumours until 1483. After the sudden and unexpected death of the Edward IV in April of that year, the accusation of witchcraft once again reared its ugly head: with Jacquetta, Warwick and Edward all dead, however, the new target was Elizabeth herself, her accuser none other than Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Edward's brother had seen his chance to ascend the throne, and he was determined to overthrow the power-hungry Woodvilles once and for all.

The story goes that Richard arrived in good spirits to a council meeting, only to abruptly leave the room a short while later. Upon his return his manner was much changed, and with a flourish he pulled back his sleeve to reveal his arm, declaring it badly withered and accusing Elizabeth – "that sorceress" – of causing his affliction. Not only that, but the Dowager Queen had accomplices, one of whom was Jane Shore, the best known and, it was said, best loved, of Edward IV's many mistresses.

The accusation was made official in January of the following year when Richard III's first – and only – parliament passed the act of Titulus Regius, which consolidated his power and hold on the throne by declaring the children of Edward IV and Elizabeth illegitimate. The reasons given in the act were two fold: first, it was said that Edward had already been betrothed to Lady Eleanor Butler, and therefore his marriage to Elizabeth was invalid and the children of their union were bastards. Second, and the part that has gripped the popular imagination in the years that have followed, the accusation was made that the marriage was invalid because it had been brought about by unnatural means by Elizabeth and her mother, Jacquetta.

An illustration of the titular spirit from the Jean d'Arras's popular romance *Le Livre De Mélusine*, 1478

"It is unlikely indeed there was any truth in the accusations against Elizabeth"

Passed on 23 January 1484, the act didn't mince words: the marriage was referred to as ungracious and pretended, and by which "the order of all politic rule was perverted." On the witchcraft count, however, little evidence was given, only the vague assertion that it was the common opinion of people throughout the land. The political ramifications of the act were apparent. Richard assumed power, any claims to the throne of the former queen's children squashed once and for all. Despite this, Elizabeth didn't find herself before the courts, and, with the intended outcome achieved – the disabling of the remains of the Woodville party – there was no need for the new king to push matters, his point made very clear.

The 'proof' that Elizabeth used witchcraft to snare the king comes from two cases many years after events themselves, both occurring at a time when it was politically expedient to discredit and disarm the powerful and envied Woodville faction. Could there, however, be any truth in the claims of her enemies?

Although it seems outlandish and unbelievable to modern sensibilities, love magic was widely practiced and believed in during the 15th century and beyond. Often linked to witchcraft accusations, the practice formed part of the witchcraft acts of the 16th and 17th centuries, and it must be remembered that belief in magic was as staple a belief as that of religion. In 1471, for instance, talk of enchantment entered the tale again, as on Good Friday, Edward IV rode out to meet the forces of the Earl of Warwick at Barnet for what was to prove the deciding battle in the ongoing conflict between the two former allies. The fog was said to be so thick that it could not have come from any natural source, and therefore must have been brought about by witchcraft.

Elizabeth and her mother were also not the only women with royal connections to be touched by the accusation of witchcraft either before or after. Witchcraft was a particularly lethal accusation to make; it was one of a small amount against which a woman's rank offered scant protection. Joan of Navarre, the Dowager Queen of Henry IV, was imprisoned, albeit briefly, on accusations in 1419. Then there was the large scandal attached to Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, who found herself performing humiliating public penance before being subjected to life imprisonment, all because she had allegedly procured the services of Margery Jourdemayne to make the Duke marry her and also dared to have the king's horoscope drawn up to see whether the Duke – heir to Henry VI – would one day be king. Although matters did not go that far in Elizabeth's case, both she and her mother would have been chillingly aware of the potential consequences of a link between their names and witchcraft.

Looking at the evidence, however, it is unlikely indeed there was any truth in the accusations against Elizabeth and Jacquetta. Much has been made by some writers of Jacquetta's background and the family legend of descent from the mythical water spirit Melusine. It was through this connection, some say, that Jacquetta, and her daughter inherited their innate talent for witchcraft. It would not be a stretch to believe for her contemporaries – witchcraft, after all, was believed to run in families, passed down from

The price of love

Just what might you find in a Medieval love spell?

Mandrake root
Known for its properties as an aphrodisiac as far back as biblical times, mandrake remained a popular ingredient in love magic throughout the middle ages and is still used for that purpose in some areas of the world today. Said to resemble the human form, with both male and female plants, there was one drawback – the plant was said to shriek when pulled up, causing madness or death to the seeker unless proper precautions were taken.

Human remains
Powdered bone, pubic hair and menstrual blood were just some of the gruesome ingredients a love-seeker could be required to provide in order to ensure their spell was a success, and it was especially potent if something from both the seeker and the object of desire was included. One known spell required rather specifically both the bone marrow and spleen of a murdered boy.

Honey
One of the sweeter and more palatable ingredients, honey or mead were often included in love spells – the sweetness, it was expected, to influence the object of the seeker's desire favourably towards them and also to sweeten the relationship to follow. It had the added benefit of making the concoction much easier to swallow.

Henbane
With a sinister reputation, both for use by witches and also to deprive one of her powers, this herb was also thought to attract love when worn. It could be used to bind a couple together in love, and to ensure that the love would last. This ingredient should be used with great caution, however, as it was also known to cause delirium and death.

Worms
Another gruesome ingredient, when mixed with powdered periwinkle and certain herbs, worms were believed to ensure love between a couple. The suggestion that it be taken with their meat may well have been due to the less than encouraging taste. Seemingly a strange choice, worms, due to their obvious link with the earth, were also a potent sign of fertility: a much desired outcome in many love spells.

Consecrated host
The power of this vital element of the Holy Communion service was highly prized in the Medieval world, making it a much sought-after ingredient for a variety of magical purposes including love spells. Difficult to procure, many inventive ways were devised to source a piece, with some resorting to keeping it under their tongue after it had been administered in church. Relevant words and incantations could then be written upon it depending on what was required.

A young man buys a love potion in this original etching from Molière's 17th-century comedy *L'amour Médecin*

mother to daughter across the generations, an idea that was likewise prevalent in the future witch trials of England. There is scant evidence, however, that either Jacquetta or Elizabeth held much stock in the family legend, and its existence is not evidence in itself that they considered capitalising on the story to enhance their prospects.

Likewise, it has been asserted that Elizabeth and Edward were married on 1 May: traditionally known as Beltane, it marks one of the most important dates of the pagan calendar and is deeply linked in the popular consciousness with witchcraft. There are even some accounts that have the king himself joining in the unearthly frolics, cavorting away the night before his marriage with Elizabeth, her mother, and their fellow witches. This is, of course, pure fabrication: true enough Edward was said to be exhausted after his wedding night, but there were no doubt more earthly and ultimately more satisfying explanations for that fact.

With the seeming suddenness and unexpected nature of the king's marriage, along with the less than positive response to the identity of

Elizabeth says farewell to her son, Richard, in a Victorian illustration

his queen, it was perhaps easier for people to believe or to at least mutter about the possibility of mystical means being behind the match. Elizabeth attracted censure and hostility from the start; her good looks were much envied, and, combined with her lack of lands and titles when she caught the king's eye - she was in fact at that point the only queen who had been plucked from the ranks of ordinary subjects to be crowned - she was in a prime position to find herself the subject of rumours and stories. She was also seen by some as a grabbing, haughty social upstart - a most unsuitable wife and queen for the king. Her mother was also seen as having too much influence, inspiring her daughter to not only snare the king in the first place, but also to secure advantageous positions and marriages for various members of their large family.

It is highly unlikely, however, though a good a story it might make, that Elizabeth and her mother dabbled in witchcraft to bring about the advantageous marriage. If there was anything other than chance at play then it was the possibility that Elizabeth was schooled, perhaps by her mother, to wait there that day for Edward to ride past, but there is precious little evidence even for that level of intervention.

The allegations made against both Elizabeth and her mother are best viewed through the political lens of the day. Upon the unexpected death of Edward IV, there were two main contenders for power and influence - Edward's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and the Woodville faction headed by the queen. The Woodvilles posed a direct threat to Richard, favouring rule by the whole council while the young Edward V was in his minority, Richard's role as protector was that of name only, rather than granting absolute control over the young and impressionable monarch. Quite simply, Richard wanted Elizabeth and her children disarmed and out of the way.

As for Richard's assertions that Elizabeth had withered his arm and stolen his breath, it is hardly surprising that he was unable or unwilling to carry these accusations further. Thomas More dismissed them as rubbish, citing Elizabeth's well-known dislike of Jane Shore as reason enough to dismiss the accusation of the two women working together, while also pointing out that, in his opinion, Elizabeth was far too clever to have embarked upon such an unwise course of action as dabbling in witchcraft.

> "Elizabeth was schooled, perhaps by her mother, to wait there that day for Edward to ride past"

Was Elizabeth a witch? The answer would have to be no. Whatever one believes, the myth is, however, an enduring and popular one; the theory given renewed credence in recent literary and television adaptations of the story of Edward and Elizabeth that have proved all too well that the idea is not going to fade any time soon.

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EDWARD IV, HENRY VI AND SAINT GEORGE

Artist: Edward Burne-Jones

Depicting the monarchs of the Wars of the Roses alongside the patron saint of England, Pre-Raphaelite artist and designer Edward Burne-Jones' watercolour, pen and ink masterpiece echoes the style of stained glass. This was a medium in which he – alongside frequent collaborator William Morris – quickly became a figurehead.

1862 or 1864

EDWARD IV, HENRY VI AND ST GEORGE

© Alamy

INSIDE THE YORKIST COURT

Edward IV was big in every way. While chroniclers disagreed about him and his regime, they couldn't ignore them...

Written by Derek Wilson

The king who returned triumphant from Towton was 1.9 metres in height. He was muscular and athletic, and the Flemish chronicler Philippe de Commines claimed, "I don't remember ever having seen a more handsome man." Most observers agreed that he was of an outward-going disposition and had an easy manner. As a military leader, he had the very rare distinction of never having lost a battle. But did the qualities that had won him the crown serve him and the country well when it came to exercising royal power?

Later writers described Edward as a self-indulgent sybarite, but that does not do justice to his character and achievements. Certainly, there was nothing lacking in the splendour of the Yorkist court. The exuberant king loved to surround himself with fine and beautiful things, and foreign visitors compared the splendour of Edward's household favourably with that of the Duke of Burgundy, which was generally recognised as the most culturally advanced in Europe.

But the magnificent ambience of the royal residences betokened more than self-indulgence. Edward knew he had to make an impression on his nobles and the representatives of other European rulers. The Lord Chief Justice of the Kings Bench of the time, Sir John Fortescue, in his magnum opus, *On the Laws and Governance of England*, pointed out the necessity of royal opulence.

"It shall need that the King have such treasure as he may make new buildings when he will for his

The coronation of Edward IV in June 1461

pleasure and magnificence; and as he may buy him rich clothes, rich stones, and other jewels and ornaments convenient to his estate royal. And often times he will buy rich hangings and other apparel for his houses and do other such noble and great costs as befitteth his royal majesty."

Fortescue was a loyal Lancastrian who had followed Queen Margaret until her cause was irretrievably lost. He knew how impoverished Henry VI's court had been and the negative impact this had created.

"...Subjects will rather go with a lord who is rich than with their king who has nothing in his purse."

Edward didn't make the same mistake. It is estimated that his annual personal expenditure was about £8.3 million in modern money. Lavish displays promoted confidence in his regime.

But Edward's extravagance cannot be written off as 'vulgar display'. He did not only spend money on furniture, plate, tapestries, jewels, clothes and other adornments. He revelled in tournaments and other semi-public and private entertainments and he left to posterity one of the architectural gems of the age – St George's Chapel, Windsor, a magnificent example of the uniquely English Perpendicular Gothic style. Henry VII, not famed as a 'big spender', later attempted to outdo Edward's masterpiece in his extension of Westminster Abbey.

Edward modelled his court on that of Burgundy, which he visited during his brief exile. He amassed an impressive collection of illuminated manuscripts and books that became the foundation of the royal collection that is now housed in the British Library. But perhaps the king's greatest contribution to the nation's wellbeing was simply staying in power. From 1471 to 1483, England experienced peace, security and sound government that it hadn't known since the reign of Henry V for, although the Wars of the Roses had not really started until 1455, aristocratic rivalries, economic decline and social unrest had persisted for as long as most people could remember. Most contemporary accounts describe an affable king who was approachable and who strove to achieve unity in difficult times.

However, there was another side to him – one that went against all that he had accomplished. Peace and success went to his head. He enjoyed power for its own sake, was strong-willed and declined good counsel, leading to dissensions among his advisers and within his family.

His most catastrophic error was falling out with Richard Neville, the charismatic and capable Earl of Warwick. Edward owed his throne to Warwick, the richest nobleman in England, whose military prowess and widespread connections had proved crucial on several occasions. The Earl, some 14 years older than the king, believed that he merited the position of most trusted councillor but Edward was determined to be his own man. While Warwick was in France negotiating a treaty and Edward's marriage to a French princess in 1464, the king secretly married Elizabeth Woodville. He then lavished lands and titles on her relatives and fell under their influence. This provoked a family feud at court involving not only Warwick, but also Edward's brothers, George, Duke of Clarence and Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

This eventually led to Warwick and Clarence defecting to the Lancastrians. Warwick freed the ex-monarch, Henry VI, from prison in London and proclaimed him king in the so-called 'Readeption of Henry VI'. Edward fled to Burgundy, but was soon back with a small army that grew as he marched towards London. In the ensuing Battle of Barnet in April 1471, Warwick was killed.

Victory at Tewkesbury in the following month secured Edward's hold on the throne – something he reinforced by having Henry VI murdered in the Tower of London. The Lancastrian cause was lost and most of Margaret's supporters accepted the fait accompli. However, all of this did not sweep away discontent among the nobility or silence criticism of the regime. Strong rumours persisted after his death that he was a libidinous monarch in charge of a licentious court. But how much of this was actually true?

That Edward was a passionate extrovert is beyond doubt. Philippe de Commines wrote of him, "No man ever took more delight in his pleasures... especially in the ladies, feasts, banquets and hunts." Commines reflected that the sovereign's debaucheries were one cause of the troubles that beset him, but Commines was in

"A balanced assessment of Edward's character should start with the realisation that his vices went with his virtues"

The arms of Edward IV illustrated in *Le Chemin de Vaillance* held by the British Library

St George's Chapel at Windsor was built by Edward IV

the service of Louis XI of France, with whom, he claimed, no other contemporary monarch could bear comparison.

Dominic Mancini, an Italian writer who spent only a few months in England in the immediate aftermath of Edward's death, described the late king as "licentious in the extreme... he pursued with no discrimination the married and the unmarried, the noble and the lowly; however he took none by force". The best that can be said of his verdict is that it reflected contemporary gossip.

Edward did have mistresses but that scarcely marks him as unusual among the male members of Europe's royal and noble houses in the 15th century. Furthermore, if he scattered his seed as widely as some commentators have suggested, it is remarkable that only a couple of his supposed illegitimate children can be reliably identified.

The king was accused of bigamy, having contracted an earlier marriage than his union with Elizabeth Woodville, but this was by men supporting the claim to the throne of Richard III, his brother, who had a vested interest in declaring that Edward's offspring by Elizabeth were not conceived in lawful wedlock and, therefore, not legitimate heirs.

The Croyland continuator - the contemporary contributor to the chronicle produced in Croyland Abbey - whose information came largely from Woodville sources contrasted the king's "debauchery, extravagance and secular enjoyments" with his remarkable shrewdness in matters of government. Polydore Vergil and Thomas More, writing in the Tudor era, took it as read that Edward's uncontrollable passions undermined his abilities as king.

Any attempt at a balanced assessment of Edward's character should start with the realisation that his vices went with his virtues. Sometimes they led him into unwise decisions. Undoubtedly, his biggest mistake was marrying for love. It was generally accepted that kings were free to take their pleasures wherever they wanted, but alliances were made for the good of the nation.

Marrying within the realm upset the balance of political forces. Leading Yorkist families who had fought in Edward's cause expected to enjoy proximity to the king and positions of influence as perks for their loyalty. The Woodvilles were resented as Lancastrian intruders. For their part, they cemented their position by influencing royal policy and in marrying into the leading noble families. This could only arouse jealousies and exacerbate rivalries at a time when Edward was genuinely trying to bind up old wounds.

Elizabeth's siblings (all 12 of them) naturally made the most of their good fortune and the king was reckless in lavishing rewards upon them all. This made them appear grasping and unprincipled - obvious scapegoats to be blamed for the "degeneracy" of the English court. In fact, the Woodville men, particularly Anthony, were both cultivated and devout. Anthony himself was an early patron of the printer William Caxton and was among the first to recognise the importance of the printing press.

Affable Edward was too trusting and implacable by turns. He spared both Henry VI and his own brother, Clarence, as long as possible, only to later dispose of them violently and in secret. His ingratitude drove Warwick to rebellion and he deprived himself of an adviser who could have balanced the undoubted influence of his in-laws. His own guilty conscience made him keep his marriage to Elizabeth Woodville a secret for as long as possible. The death of Clarence impacted on his other brother, Richard of Gloucester, who determined to purge the realm of Woodvilles as soon as Edward was buried.

Edward IV was a remarkable king who brought his realm a dozen years of peace and stability, but his character had its flaws. This, combined with the intense rivalries plaguing England, created the popular image of a corrupt court and a weak monarch. However, in the scale of dissolute kings Edward lags well behind the likes of Edward II, Richard II and Charles II - to name but a few.

The merchant king

"The law is like unto a Welshman's house, To each man's leg that shapen is and mete"

The popular rhyme indicated the contempt felt for the chaos in which the law counted for little and was manipulated by those in power. Edward began the task of getting the social 'machine' working smoothly and efficiently. Central to this was trade.

A healthy economy meant not only prosperity for the king's subjects, but also for the government. An efficient flow of goods in and out of the country brought essential customs revenue to the crown and Edward encouraged the ship-building industry by granting the owners of new vessels a first voyage free from tariffs. He also restricted the transport of goods in foreign vessels by decreeing that English ships must be used if available.

Merchants were not slow to take advantage of the improved trading conditions. We can still see the evidence for this in the 'wool' churches and timber-framed town mansions built by the rich who exported wool and woollen cloth. But the richest of them all was the king. His factors sent wool, cloth, tin and pewter to various European destinations, while importing woad, alum, wax, wine and paper for him.

Edward also made basic financial reforms, issued new coins such as the angel and rose noble, and established new mints across the country. Leading magnates were not slow to follow where the king led by getting into trade. Edward IV's reign is a classic example of the maxim 'money talks'.

A groat from the second reign of Edward IV

The Chronicles of England, an illumination depicting Jean de Wavrin presenting his book to the king

RETREAT AND REVENGE

During the 1460s, the Lancastrians' greatest challenge was to garner enough support to challenge Edward IV and return Henry VI to the throne. The struggle was arduous but ten years later, Lancastrian hopes had been rekindled

Written by Jon Wright

In the aftermath of the devastating Battle of Towton in March 1461, Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou and their son Edward took flight to Scotland. The goal – one that would dominate the long period of Lancastrian exile – was to recruit foreign support for their cause.

The Lancastrians still had their champions south of the border, especially in Wales and northern England, and the earl of Oxford and others would be executed in early 1462 for communicating with Margaret and plotting a landing in Essex. Still, horizons had to be broadened. Margaret took the lead in these efforts but while she was treated courteously wherever she travelled, it proved frustratingly difficult to locate a consistent ally.

Scotland, for instance, had been ruled by Mary of Gueldres, regent of the young King James III, since August 1460. Continuing the policies of James II, her aim was to play off the Lancastrian and Yorkist camps in Scotland's best interests. In April 1461, she promised aid to the Lancastrians in exchange for the town of Berwick – a much-coveted border possession – but if help could be provided, it could just as easily be snatched away.

This pattern can be glimpsed in the chaotic military and diplomatic manoeuvres that unfolded over the next few years. In October 1462, Mary was agreeing to a truce with Edward IV's government but by the following March, Scottish and Lancastrian troops were fighting alongside each other in raids on Yorkist possessions in northern England. By December 1462, however, another truce with Edward was in place and Henry VI, his patience now exhausted, headed across the border to Bamburgh. The Lancastrians had some determined advocates in Scotland but Mary was never likely to make for a reliable ally and by the time of her death in December 1463, she had clearly decided that the momentum in England's civil conflict was all on the Yorkist side.

Margaret of Anjou's efforts to cajole the French into lending support were also met with limited success. In July

With her husband imprisoned in the Tower of London, Margaret of Anjou and her son, Edward of Westminster, went into exile

MARGARET, QUEEN of HENRY VI.
Protected by a Robber.

Edwards inv. *C. Grignion sculp.*

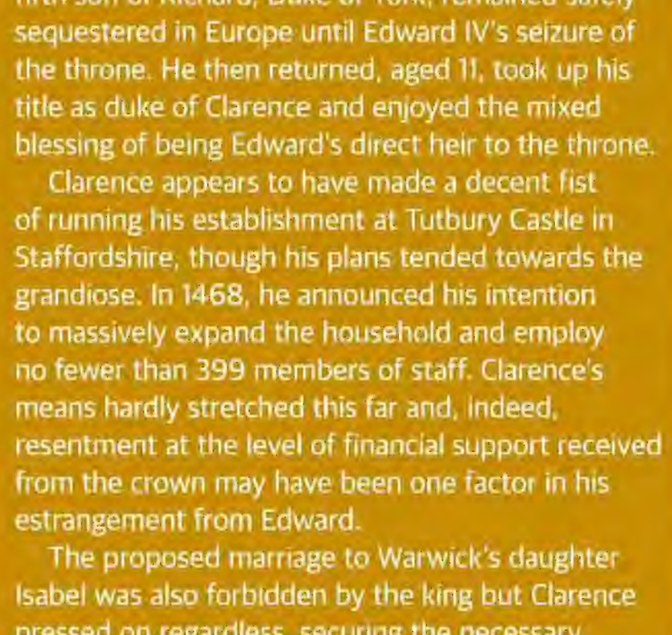
"In June 1468, it became increasingly difficult for Louis to see why he should keep faith in the Yorkist king"

George, Duke of Clarence

Owing to a career crammed with machinations and betrayals, Edward IV's brother has suffered almost universal condemnation from historians. His was, however, an unusually difficult path to tread. The fifth son of Richard, Duke of York, remained safely sequestered in Europe until Edward IV's seizure of the throne. He then returned, aged 11, took up his title as duke of Clarence and enjoyed the mixed blessing of being Edward's direct heir to the throne.

Clarence appears to have made a decent fist of running his establishment at Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire, though his plans tended towards the grandiose. In 1468, he announced his intention to massively expand the household and employ no fewer than 399 members of staff. Clarence's means hardly stretched this far and, indeed, resentment at the level of financial support received from the crown may have been one factor in his estrangement from Edward.

The proposed marriage to Warwick's daughter Isabel was also forbidden by the king but Clarence pressed on regardless, securing the necessary papal dispensation for a match between two such closely related people. The wedding, in July 1469, marked a new phase in Warwick and Clarence's designs, and the stage was set for their infamous interventions in English politics. For this, and all that followed, Clarence has been declared to have been wildly ambitious, perhaps even mentally unhinged, and he will doubtless always be remembered as, in Shakespeare's famous phrase, "false, fleeting, perjur'd Clarence."



George, Duke of Clarence, was one of the most notorious yet least predictable figures during the Wars of the Roses

1461, the duke of Somerset and Lord Moleyns were sent to treat with the French king and in April 1462, Margaret headed for France herself. After some delay, she met with the new French king, Louis XI, who was less drawn to the Lancastrian cause than his predecessor, Charles VII, had been. However, agreements were reached in June at Chinon and Tours that French support would be offered in exchange for the surrender of Calais.

Margaret led a fleet to England but Louis appears not have delivered the expected funds and the small company of troops had most likely been paid for by Margaret's staunch ally, Pierre de Brézé. Despite these limited resources, the Lancastrians managed to temporarily recapture the castles at Bamburgh, Alnwick and Dunstanburgh, but they had all returned to Yorkist hands by the end of the year. French assistance would one day prove crucial to the Lancastrian cause but that moment was still years away. Another visit to Louis in August 1463 secured no diplomatic victories and Louis had signed a formal truce with Edward IV by October.

Meanwhile, Margaret's efforts to win over another potential ally, Philip of Burgundy, during the second trip to the continent were equally fruitless. In a rather melodramatic account, the chronicler Georges Chastellain painted a harrowing portrait of the unfortunate queen: "She arrived there poor and alone, destitute of all goods and desolate; she had neither credence nor money" and her "body was clad in a single robe, with no change of clothing." Margaret was "formerly one of the most splendid women of the world, and now the poorest" so "it was a piteous thing to see... this high princess so cast down and laid low in such great danger." It seems unlikely that Margaret was ever in quite such dire pecuniary straits but by the end of 1463 the Lancastrian cause was clearly in peril.

More severe blows arrived during 1464. After years of conflict in the north, the Lancastrian resistance was all but destroyed following the Yorkist victories at Hedgeley Moor and Hexham. The cream of the Lancastrian leadership was killed or executed and the few who escaped were eventually hunted down. Sir Ralph Gray managed to find temporary refuge at Bamburgh Castle but was soon captured and executed at Doncaster - his head was sent south and displayed on London Bridge. All the north's major fortresses were now in Yorkist hands and Lancastrian fortunes were low.

Matters worsened in the summer of 1465. During the conflict at Hexham, Henry VI had been stationed at nearby Bywell Castle. Following the battle, he escaped and spent the next year travelling furtively around Lancashire, West Yorkshire and Westmorland. In July 1465, however, he was recognised while having dinner with the local gentry at Waddington Hall in Ribblesdale. He managed to slip away on that evening but his whereabouts were revealed by an Abingdon monk, William Cantelowe, and a band of Yorkist knights soon found him.

With his feet bound, Henry was taken to London and, after being paraded through the streets, was imprisoned in the Tower. His five-year stay was far from uncomfortable - he was provided with a priest who celebrated a daily mass, visitors could come and go as they pleased, wine was sometimes sent from the royal cellars, and velvet occasionally arrived for the purposes of making his clothes. Henry was perfectly safe. If he had been killed, Lancastrian

Linlithgow Palace, Margaret of Anjou's first port of call during the Scottish exile

ambitions would have shifted to his son Edward, who was in many ways a better candidate for the throne. Still, the incarceration represented a heavy blow to the Lancastrians' pride and prospects.

Through all this, Margaret of Anjou was residing in France, chiefly at the château of Kœur-la-Petite at Saint-Mihiel in the duchy of Bar. The château was owned by Margaret's father, upon whom Margaret was also dependent for a steady income. Life there was not sumptuous but with Lancastrian fortunes in tatters back in England, many old allies arrived and something akin to a court-in-exile began to emerge. The establishment was never huge – peaking at perhaps 200 people – but it provided a useful base of operations for the Lancastrians.

Margaret's efforts to rally support continued. The rulers of Portugal and Castile were approached with no success and through Margaret's brother Jean, Duke of Calabria, attempts to win over Louis XI were sustained. Margaret's great ally Sir John Fortescue also applied constant pressure to Louis, hoping to convince him that Edward IV was bent on launching an invasion against France.

Some solace was found in the fact that Margaret's son, Edward, was emerging as a creditable young man. In 1467, the duke of Milan was informed that Edward, though still a teenager, "applied himself wholly to feats of arms, much delighting to ride upon wild and unbroken horses" though he was also prone to illness – something that sent Margaret off on pilgrimage, hoping for divine assistance in her son's recovery. We may well feel rather sorry for Margaret and recognise how appropriate the subtitle of one 17th-century account of her life truly was: in her history, wrote Michel Baudier, "may be seen the inconstancy of fortune... and the miseries of human life to which crowns and sceptres are subject."

More promising days lay ahead, however. The cautious Louis XI became decidedly more amenable to assisting the Lancastrian cause when relations between Burgundy and England strengthened during the late 1460s. When Edward IV's sister married Charles of Burgundy in June 1468, it became increasingly difficult for Louis to see why he should keep faith with the Yorkist king. Back in England, meanwhile, an unexpected potential ally emerged.

Margaret and her advisers had always tried to sustain links with Lancastrian allies at home, though for those delivering the messages this could be a hazardous business.

The Lancastrians also saw merit in spreading rumours that the Yorkist camp was not nearly as united as it appeared. Louis XI was informed, on several occasions, that the earl of Warwick was exhibiting signs of sympathy with the Lancastrians – a well-designed tactic as Louis held Warwick in high esteem. For a long time this was little more than rumour-mongering that few, and certainly not Louis, took seriously. As the decade drew to a close, however, the fantasy became a genuine possibility.

Warwick's relationship with Edward IV had begun to sour from the mid-1460s. Finally, by 1469, Warwick's frustrations had boiled over. In league with George, Duke of Clarence, Warwick supported a rebellion in the north of England and simultaneously oversaw the nuptials between his daughter and Clarence at Calais. Immediately after the wedding, Warwick and Clarence issued a manifesto of grievances that denounced unjust taxation and the feeble enforcement of the rule of law.

The two men claimed that their goal was simply to rid Edward IV of evil counsel and set the realm back on track. Nonetheless, they went so far as to mount an incursion into England and after military engagement at Edgecote on 26 July, they had control of the king. That battle was also followed by the deaths of some of Warwick's most significant rivals, including the earls River, Pembroke and Devon.

A negative public reaction forced Edward's release and over the winter of 1469-70, strenuous efforts were made to achieve reconciliation and hammer out a mode of government that all parties could tolerate. By the spring of 1470, however, Clarence and Warwick were moving ever closer to the realisation that removing Edward from the throne was their only feasible course of action. After supporting another rebellion, this time in Lincolnshire, Warwick and Clarence departed for France, arriving at Honfleur in May.

Margaret of Anjou was deeply suspicious of Warwick and blamed him, with good reason, for most of the troubles that had befallen her over the previous decade. Nonetheless, Louis XI worked hard to secure an accord between the two old foes and, after prolonged discussions at Angers, it was agreed that Margaret's son Edward would marry Warwick's daughter Anne. The crucial condition was that the match would only be confirmed if Warwick managed to place either Henry VI or Edward on the English throne.

The Lancastrian cause had been re-energised. Not too long ago the only remaining Lancastrian outpost in Britain had been Harlech Castle in north Wales and even the attempted relief of this stronghold by Jasper Tudor had been a disaster. Now bold initiatives could once more be contemplated and all thanks to the most surprising of allies. Before too long, Warwick would be sailing for England with Margaret following closely behind. A new chapter in the Wars of the Roses was about to be unleashed.

A statue of Margaret of Anjou with her son, Edward of Westminster

© WIKI Alamy Leemage

DEATH OF A TURNCOAT

Yorkist King Edward IV marched against his powerful former ally the earl of Warwick in a quest to regain his throne

Written by William E Welsh

A dense fog blanketed the heath north of Barnet as the men of the opposing armies girded themselves for battle on the morning of 14 April 1471. The first two hours of the morning were spent in preliminary exchanges of cannon fire and an archery duel in an effort to soften up the opposition. At approximately 7am, King Edward IV gave the order for his Yorkist troops to advance against the Lancastrian host led by his ally-turned-enemy Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Salisbury.

The Yorkist troops stepped off with confidence in the knowledge that they were fighting to preserve the Yorkist monarchy. The sound of clanging weapons signaled the beginning of a furious clash between thousands of soldiers. At stake were the opposing agendas of the two most powerful men in England. Edward sought to regain his throne, while Warwick sought to protect the claim of Henry VI and his Lancastrian heirs.

Warwick had played a key role in helping the young Edward to obtain the crown of England in 1461. Following Edward's coronation that year, Warwick served as Edward's chief advisor, but as the years progressed his role was gradually diminished as other magnates slowly gained the king's confidence.

Warwick plotted in 1469 with Edward's brother, George Plantagenet, Duke of Clarence, against Edward but after his efforts to drive Edward from power failed, he fled in April 1470 to France. Once there, Warwick schemed with Margaret of Anjou and the French king Louis XI to restore feeble-minded Lancastrian king Henry VI to the throne.

In September 1470, Warwick returned to England to unseat Edward. Heavily outnumbered by the Lancastrian forces, Edward fled on 29 September to Flanders where he eventually assembled the forces necessary to invade England and regain his crown. On 14 March 1471, he landed at Ravenspur in Yorkshire and headed south. His army more than doubled its size when he was joined in Leicestershire by 3,000 men who had been contributed by Lord William Hastings, Sir William Stanley and Sir William Norris.

Warwick and his brother, John Neville, Marquis of Montague, were holed up with their forces in Coventry. Edward finally arrived with his Yorkist army on 2 April. After unsuccessful attempts to draw Warwick and Montague out of Coventry to fight on open ground, Edward marched on London.

Up to that point, Edward's other brother, the duke of Clarence, had sided with Warwick but the two estranged brothers had reconciled their differences at a meeting on

Edward IV in full armor leads his prisoner, Lancastrian king Henry VI, through the streets of London before the clash at Barnet

3 April in Warwickshire. As a result, Clarence's 4,000 troops went to Edward, not Warwick. It was a heavy blow to the turncoat earl. After their rapprochement, Edward sent Clarence to entreat with Warwick in an effort to get him to negotiate a peaceful resolution but Warwick would not yield.

A substantial Lancastrian force led by Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, blocked Edward's path to London. However, it uncovered the city when it departed on 8 April for the West Country to rendezvous with Queen Margaret and her son, Prince Edward, who were scheduled to arrive from France. Warwick, who had hoped that they would block Edward, promptly sent word to his brother, George Neville, Archbishop of York, instructing him to deploy forces to prevent Edward from entering the city. By then, though, Edward's supporters in London had made a show of force on his behalf. The archbishop was whisked off to the Tower of London and municipal officials ordered the militia to disband. This rapid sequence of events heavily benefited Edward while the setbacks jeopardised Warwick's chances for a successful campaign against his nemesis.

When Edward arrived in London on 11 April, he briefly met with Henry VI. After the meeting, Henry was transferred from his royal residence to the Tower of London and Edward's ranks swelled with additional troops. Warwick, who had been just two days' march behind Edward, bivouacked at Barnet. After Easter service, the Yorkist army departed London at 4pm on 13 April.

After covering nearly 16 kilometres, aforeriders informed the king that the Lancastrian host was embattled on a ridge half a mile north of Barnet village. The forces on the Lancastrian right and centre were partially concealed behind a hedge west of the road but the rest of the Lancastrian line was on open ground. Although by then night had fallen, Edward continued his march because he wanted to get his army as close as possible to the Lancastrians in order to pounce on the enemy at dawn. Unable to discern the precise location of the enemy's flanks, Edward deployed unevenly opposite the enemy with his right flank overlapping the enemy's left flank, and his left flank short of the enemy's flank opposite it.

Warwick, when he discovered that the Yorkists were encamped in close proximity, ordered his artillery to bombard the enemy. Warwick's hope was that a sustained period of bombardment would rattle Edward's troops. The boom of the culverins pierced the night and Edward ordered his gunners not to return fire for he did not want to reveal the precise location of his forces. The Lancastrian gunners, firing blindly at night, overshot the enemy.

The opposing forces organised in Medieval units known as battles. John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, led the forces on the Lancastrian right, Montague those in the centre, and Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter, those on the left. Warwick commanded a reserve composed of his red-liveried troops arrayed beneath standards adorned with the bear and ragged staff that were situated behind Montague's position. As for the Yorkist army, Gloucester led the troops on the right, Edward led those in the centre and reserve behind it, and Lord William Hastings commanded those on the left. Edward ordered Clarence to fight alongside him to keep a close eye on him and make sure he did not switch sides or sit out the battle.

Edward issued orders that no quarter was to be given to the enemy and both sides formed up dismounted. However, the dense fog made both commanders unaware that the battle lines were uneven and that there were large overlaps on the right end of both lines.

Hastings' Midlanders had to hack their way through the hedge to get to Oxford's men. Their attack faltered given that Oxford's line overlapped Hastings'. Oxford's men repulsed the weak attack and then launched a fierce counter-attack advancing under the earl's banner on which was sewn the blazing star with streamers. Hastings' line gave way under the weight of Oxford's attack. Hastings' troops,

Romantic depictions of Barnet fail to accurately depict that the opposing sides fought dismounted

Dutch and Hanseatic League ships similar to these carried Edward from Flushing to Ravenspur in March 1471

The enemy of my enemy

Edward turned to Duke Charles of Burgundy, Warwick's enemy, for the financial support needed to recapture his throne

When Edward IV arrived in Holland in October 1470 seeking refuge from the Lancastrian-controlled government of England, he initially received a cold shoulder from Duke Charles of Burgundy because the Burgundian duke did not want to provoke King Louis XI. Charles and Edward were related through marriage to Margaret of York. Edward's younger sister had wed Charles in July 1468.

But the earl of Warwick's pact with the French king, known as the Angers Agreement, called for Warwick to ally itself with France against Burgundy. In keeping with the treaty, Warwick declared war on Burgundy while Edward was in Holland. This warmed Charles to Edward's cause. In meetings held in January 1470, the duke loaned him 50,000 gold florins (20,000 pounds) to help him purchase troops and ships to reinvade England and take back his crown by force.

Edward also entered into an agreement with cities of the Hanseatic League in which he received 14 additional ships in return for promising to give them favourable trade rights when he was back on the English throne. On 11 March 1471, Edward's 36-ship fleet, led by Burgundian admiral Lord Henry of Veere, set sail from Flushing. The ships carried hundreds of Burgundian mercenaries who would protect Edward as he set about recruiting a new Yorkist army on English soil.

many of whom were raw levies, streamed south across the heath towards Barnet. The rout occurred so swiftly that Hastings was unable to check the flight of his men.

On the opposite side of the battlefield, Gloucester's troops had a more difficult time exploiting the opportunity afforded by overlapping the enemy's flank because the majority of them were deployed on the slopes of the ridge and had to charge uphill to reach Exeter's men. Nevertheless, Gloucester's well-led troops pushed Exeter's men back as far as the Great North Road. As Exeter's soldiers were forced back on Warwick's centre, the earl dispatched reserves to stabilise his left flank. With trumpets blaring, they pitched into the enemy and strengthened Exeter's line.

In the centre, the fighting between Edward's troops, who were clad in red and blue livery, and those of Montague was more balanced. The tide first favoured Edward's men, whose morale was high fighting alongside the new king. But as the battle wore on, Montague's larger numbers began to tell. Edward's fighters lost what little ground they had gained in the middle. Armoured men pounded each other with pollaxes and swords, while commoners wearing leather jerkins and padded gambesons wielded razor-sharp billhooks.

Oxford's captains and sergeants reformed approximately 800 men and led them back through the fog towards the bloodshed. They believed that they were in a position to strike the left flank and

King Edward IV slays Warwick with his lance in a romantic depiction of the Battle of Barnet

rear of Edward's battle but this was not the case. The lines had shifted from an east-west to a north-south axis - as a result, Montague's battle was situated where Edward's had been.

Montague's men noticed a column closing on their flank but could not clearly discern the banners of the fast-approaching force through the morning mist. As Oxford's soldiers closed with them, some of Montague's men mistook his blazing star with streamers for Edward's sunburst with streamers - after all, the two banners closely resembled each other. On the mistaken belief that his men were about to be assailed on the right flank by Yorkists, Montague ordered his bowmen to fire on Oxford's column.

When they began receiving fire, Oxford's troops assumed Montague had switched sides. Warwick's army was a patchwork of Lancastrian companies and former Yorkist companies. In the days leading up to the battle, a rumour spread through the ranks that Warwick might reconcile with Edward as Clarence had done. When Montague's bowmen fired at them, Oxford's men shouted, "Treason! Treason!" Word quickly spread through the ranks

"The boom of the culverins pierced the night and Edward ordered his gunners not to return fire"

The earl of Warwick attempted to reach his horse in order to flee the battlefield but was overtaken and slain

Yorkist billmen finish off Warwick, who had difficulty fleeing the battlefield in his plate armour

of Lancastrian soldiers that some of the troops had switched sides. In the confusion of battle, there was little Warwick could do to correct the devastating misunderstanding.

By this time, the battle had been raging for more than two hours and troops on both sides were nearing exhaustion. Edward, observing the confusion in the enemy ranks, exhorted his troops to redouble their efforts. The Yorkists began swinging their weapons with fresh bursts of fury when they sensed the opposition was on the verge of collapsing. In the fierce melee, Exeter received such a severe wound that he was left for dead by his men.

As the battle approached its third hour, the Lancastrian line gave way – and the routed troops streamed north and west in an effort to escape their pursuers. Many were slain in an open area that became known afterwards as Dead Man's Bottom. As the Lancastrian line unravelled, Warwick raced on foot to try to reach his horse and flee the battlefield but Yorkist men-at-arms overtook him and killed him before Edward could stop them. The victorious Yorkists took Exeter to London where he was imprisoned. As for Oxford, he escaped to Scotland and then France.

Contemporary accounts of the battle estimate that the Lancastrians suffered 10,000 casualties at Barnet but that number is likely inflated. Modern estimates are that the Lancastrians lost 1,000 men and the Yorkists 500. The decisive Yorkist victory marked the end of Henry VI's six-month Readeption Government that had begun in October 1470 while Warwick's death removed one of the key threats to Edward's rule. Warwick's vast wealth and political acumen made him a formidable enemy – no other magnate of the Wars of the Roses wielded as much power and influence as him. Subsequently, Edward defeated the Lancastrian army led by Prince Edward of Lancaster at Tewkesbury on 4 May 1471. The prince, who died during the battle, was the last descendent of the Lancastrian line.

Henry VI remained imprisoned in the Tower of London. Although some sources state that he died of melancholy in 1471, it is alleged that Edward had him murdered. Even though he posed little threat to Edward's reign, another powerful magnate could have used him to further his own agenda. The prevailing belief is that someone struck Henry a fatal blow in the back of the head while he was at kneeling at prayer. Nevertheless, Edward ruled England unchallenged for 12 years.

"The battle had been raging for more than two hours and troops on both sides were nearing exhaustion"

The Battle of Barnet

4. Lancastrian friendly fire
Oxford rounded up a small number of his troops and led them back to the battlefield. The line of battle had shifted from east to west to north to south. As a result, Oxford's men approached Montague's right flank, instead of Edward's left flank. Mistaking Oxford's star with streamers banner for King Edward's sun with streamers, John Neville, Marquis of Montague, ordered his bowmen to fire on the approaching troops.

6. Death of the Nevilles
Sensing confusion in the Lancastrian ranks, Edward ordered his troops to redouble their efforts. Montague fell trying to rally his men. The death of Warwick's brother precipitated a wholesale rout as the morale of the Lancastrians collapsed completely. Realising the day was lost, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, attempted to escape. He was overtaken by Yorkist men-at-arms and slain before he could reach his horse.

1. Ineffective missile weapons
Both sides began shelling each other at dawn with their culverins but the thick morning fog prevented the crews from pinpointing their targets. The archers on both sides achieved better results. Since both sides had ample bowmen, neither gained a clear advantage from their arrow volleys.

3. Looting in Barnet
To Oxford's disgust, some of his men began pillaging Barnet while the outcome of the battle had yet to be decided. The meagre wages they received as soldiers contributed heavily to their desire to pillage. Meanwhile, some of Hastings' men fled all of the way to London where they unwittingly spread the false rumour that Edward had been defeated.

5. Cries of treachery
Enraged that Montague's men had fired on them, Oxford's forces immediately jumped to the conclusion that Montague had switched sides. Cries of treachery filled the air and rumor swept through the Lancastrian ranks that some of the troops had gone over to the Yorkists. The incident demoralised the Lancastrian army.

2. Oxford routs Hastings' troops
The Yorkist troops fighting under John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, assailed the Lancastrian right wing under the Lord William Hastings from the front and flank. The superior forces routed Hastings' men, who fled south into Barnet. Oxford's men gave chase, cutting down many Lancastrians as they tried to reach safety.

THE CHILDREN OF EDWARD

Artist: Paul Delaroche

This 19th-century historical scene depicts King Edward V and his younger brother, Richard of Shrewsbury imprisoned in the Tower of London. Delaroche presented this canvas for the Paris Salon de 1831, where it was a resounding success. The mystery of the princes' disappearance struck a chord with its French viewers – 40 years prior, the infant son of the Louis XVI, Louis-Charles, had been imprisoned, abused and died aged ten.

1831

King Edward V

CLASH OF CROWNS

In an age of usurpers and intrigues, the Battle of Tewkesbury seemed to sound the death knell of the Wars of the Roses...

Written by Derek Wilson

As dawn broke on 4 May 1471, Edward, duke of York, knew that his 'now or never' moment had arrived. As the sun touched the tower of Tewkesbury Abbey 2.5 kilometres to the north, he strained his eyes to make out the battle order of his Lancastrian enemies. Their defensive position was a strong one. The ground in between was a patchwork of fields and copses, intersected by hedges and narrow lanes. A frontal attack would be difficult. Worse still, to his left lay a thick belt of trees, which the opposing commander might use to outflank him. His first move was to post 200 mounted spearmen to guard against a surprise attack from that quarter. The duke and his officers now called upon God, the Virgin Mary and St George to grant them victory and deliver England from the rule of a mad king, Henry VI, his belligerent queen, Margaret, and their 17-year-old heir, Prince Edward. Then, he "displayed his banners, did blow the trumpets and advanced directly upon his enemies."

After a relatively peaceful rule for 11 years, how had Edward found himself on the battlefield once more? The king, in large measure, owed his crown to Warwick, who came to regard himself as indispensable. But Edward was determined to be his 'own man'. While Warwick was busy arranging a foreign match for the king, Edward had secretly married the beautiful Elizabeth Woodville, whose

Prince Edward was murdered during battle, making him the only heir to the English throne to be killed in action

family had fought on the opposite side. Warwick had a history of personal animosity towards the Woodvilles, who he regarded as ill-bred upstarts. Seeing Elizabeth and her relatives ruling the roost in the royal court was more than he could stomach. He won over Edward's brother, George, duke of Clarence, and plotted with Margaret to restore Henry VI with himself as the power behind the throne.

In 1470, Warwick invaded with an Anglo-French army and Edward was forced to flee abroad. Now it was his turn to win foreign support. Clarence swapped sides and, with his support, Edward returned. He defeated and killed Warwick at the Battle of Barnet on 14 April. The stage was set for the final showdown at Tewkesbury.

Margaret and her son, Prince Edward, landed at Weymouth on the same day as the battle of Barnet and did not hear of Warwick's death for a few days. Since they could not look for support from the earl's army, they contemplated returning to France. It was largely at Edward's insistence that his mother decided to make for Wales, where she hoped to link with supporters from the principality and from Cheshire and Lancashire. King Edward, too, was obliged to make a sudden change of plans. He had stood down most of his men after Barnet and now had to gather his forces again in order to pursue the Lancastrians.

Less than three weeks after the Battle of Tewkesbury, Henry VI was dead

Margaret's force was joined by troops raised by the duke of Somerset and the earl of Devon. Various estimates are given of the size of her army, but it is thought she had between 4,000 and 6,000 armed men at her disposal. The Lancastrians made what speed they could but the pace of their advance was determined by the massive iron cannon that had to be dragged by teams of oxen. Eventually they abandoned some of their artillery, which was then captured by the Yorkists. Their immediate objective was the River Severn, which they had to cross in order to rendezvous with their allies. Informed by scouts of the king's position, Margaret despatched armed detachments in other directions to deceive Edward of her true intentions. A skirmish at Sodbury Hill (19 kilometres north east of Bristol) lost the king several men and valuable time. But he now realised his enemy was making for Gloucester, the nearest crossing point of the river. He sent messengers to the military governor of the city instructing him to close his gates to the Lancastrians. Margaret was forced to make another change of plans. Should she stand and fight or make her already weary soldiers march another 25 kilometres to the next crossing at Upton-upon-Severn? She decided on the latter. She reached Tewkesbury at about 4pm on 3 May and pitched camp. There was a ford

After being taken prisoner at the battle, Margaret of Anjou was paraded through London in triumph

nearby at Lode but it was small and to attempt a crossing would have been to run the risk of the Lancastrian host being divided into two contingents, one each side of the river. The weather was hot. The army was short of water and food. Margaret's only possible tactics now were to find a good defensive position and wait for the enemy to arrive.

Edward's army was experiencing similar discomfort. They were having to march farther and faster to close the gap. The king drove them hard, ordering a succession of forced marches with only short rests between. He did have the advantage that most of his men were mounted. In the morning he arrived to find that the Lancastrians had already taken up their positions. The duke of Somerset was in command and had drawn up his army in three 'battles' on sloping ground between two streams. He himself led the right wing. Prince Edward was placed in the centre with the experienced Lord Wenlock and Sir John Longstruther to advise him. The left battle was led by the earl of Devon. Edward and his mother rode amid the ranks of their troops with words of encouragement. Then Margaret withdrew to a nearby convent to await news of the battle.

The king had little option but to draw up his troops in similar formation facing the enemy across the 400 metres of difficult terrain. Edward took the centre battle, carefully keeping beside him the duke of Clarence, whose loyalty had proved changeable of late. To his right was Lord Hastings' division. To his left was the king's

It quickly became clear that the although the Lancastrians had superior numbers, the tricky terrain would work in the Yorkists' favour

Wars of the Roses

A Tug o' War between Lancaster and York

22 MAY 1455

First Battle of St Albans

This first confrontation is only a skirmish but the duke of Somerset, Queen Margaret's military leader, is killed, leaving the way for Richard of York to resume as protector.

30 DECEMBER 1460

Battle of Wakefield

Rejecting York's demand that his own son should be heir to the throne, a Lancastrian army attacks Sandal Castle, York's stronghold. Richard is killed in the fighting.

29 MARCH 1461

Battle of Towton

This long and close battle – the bloodiest fought on British soil – proves Edward of York's military skill and forces Henry VI to flee.

13 SEPTEMBER 1470

Warwick's Invasion

Warwick and Clarence attract several disillusioned nobles and Edward IV flees to the Netherlands. Henry VI is restored. Prince Edward marries Warwick's daughter.

4 MAY 1471

Battle of Tewkesbury

Edward returns and kills Warwick at the Battle of Barnet then races to stop Margaret's army reaching Wales. Prince Edward is killed. Afterwards, Henry VI is murdered.

9 APRIL 1483

Edward V accedes to the throne

When Edward IV dies, his 12-year-old son becomes king. Richard of Gloucester gains custody of the king and his younger brother.

MAY-JULY 1483

Richard III crowned

Richard lodges Edward IV's sons in the Tower, removes their leading Woodville relatives, and is crowned on 6 July. Parliament confirms his right in the statute Titulus Regius.

22 AUGUST 1485

Battle of Bosworth

Henry Tudor lands in Wales with French troops, is joined by enemies of Richard and defeats and kills Richard at Bosworth, to become Henry VII.

younger brother, Richard of Gloucester. The fighting began with an exchange of artillery fire and fusillades of arrows, intended to unnerve the opposition. This bombardment had little effect.

The Yorkists advanced but Somerset used these opening manoeuvres in an attempt to outflank the enemy. He had spotted the weak point to the king's left and he tried to surprise Gloucester's contingent. What was supposed to happen was that as Somerset sowed confusion on the Yorkists' left, Wenlock would charge the centre. The plan failed for two reasons. Edward had foreseen the possible danger to his exposed left wing and posted his 200 spearmen to check the Lancastrian attack. Gloucester wheeled his division around to face the challenge. Then the second disaster struck. While the Yorkists were engaged on their left, Wenlock was supposed to make his frontal attack. Unaccountably, he failed to do so. This gave the enemy time to recover from their initial confusion and move leftwards to fill the gap in their ranks. The king sent his cavalry to attack Somerset, whose men fled in disorder. The field where many were cut down is still called 'Bloody Meadow'. According to an account published 77 years later, Somerset immediately confronted Wenlock in a great fury and dashed his brains out with a battle-axe. The remaining Lancastrian lines now broke. The king's enemies fled in all directions. Many were cut down by their pursuers. Others drowned while trying to wade the Avon in Tewkesbury. The Lancastrian leaders who had survived were killed while fleeing or executed after summary trial. Prince Edward was discovered by Clarence who, perhaps to emphasise his new-found loyalty to his brother, killed him on the spot.

The death of the Lancastrian heir was the most important outcome of the day. Up to this point, Henry VI had been kept in the Tower of London as a hostage. Now he was of no use to Edward IV. He was killed on 21 May, the day of Edward's triumphant return to London. The direct Lancastrian line from Henry V was no more. There was a 14-year-old boy, Henry Tudor, descended from Henry V's widow, but his claim was tenuous and he had fled to Brittany after the battle. Edward thought he could deal with this 'loose end' by negotiating with the duke of Brittany. That was to prove a costly misjudgment.

England's new king was exactly what the country needed. The contrast between him and his predecessor couldn't have been more marked. A French commentator wrote of Edward IV, "I do not remember ever having seen a man more handsome than he was." Another commended the king for his "dedication to the common weal and government" of the realm. He was affable and approachable. But his immense self-will showed itself also in over-indulgence and ruthlessness. In middle years he grew fat and his unhealthy lifestyle probably contributed to his death at 40. The wealth and titles the king lavished on his wife's family, the 'upstart' Woodvilles, provoked jealousy among the nobility and his own kin. In 1478, he had his brother George, duke of Clarence, murdered in the Tower. His other brother, Richard of Gloucester, disapproved of Edward's lifestyle and his in-laws. After the king's death, he wasted no time in purging the court of his brother's closest relatives and friends.

Edward's Achievements

Economic stability
Edward was a strong king who gave England a dozen years of peace and stability. Trade and industry, especially woollen cloth production, recovered thanks, in part, to the king's encouragement.

Military activity
Edward enjoyed the reputation of never having lost a battle. He invaded France but there was no fighting; Louis XI paid him handsomely to go home under the Treaty of Picquigny in 1475.

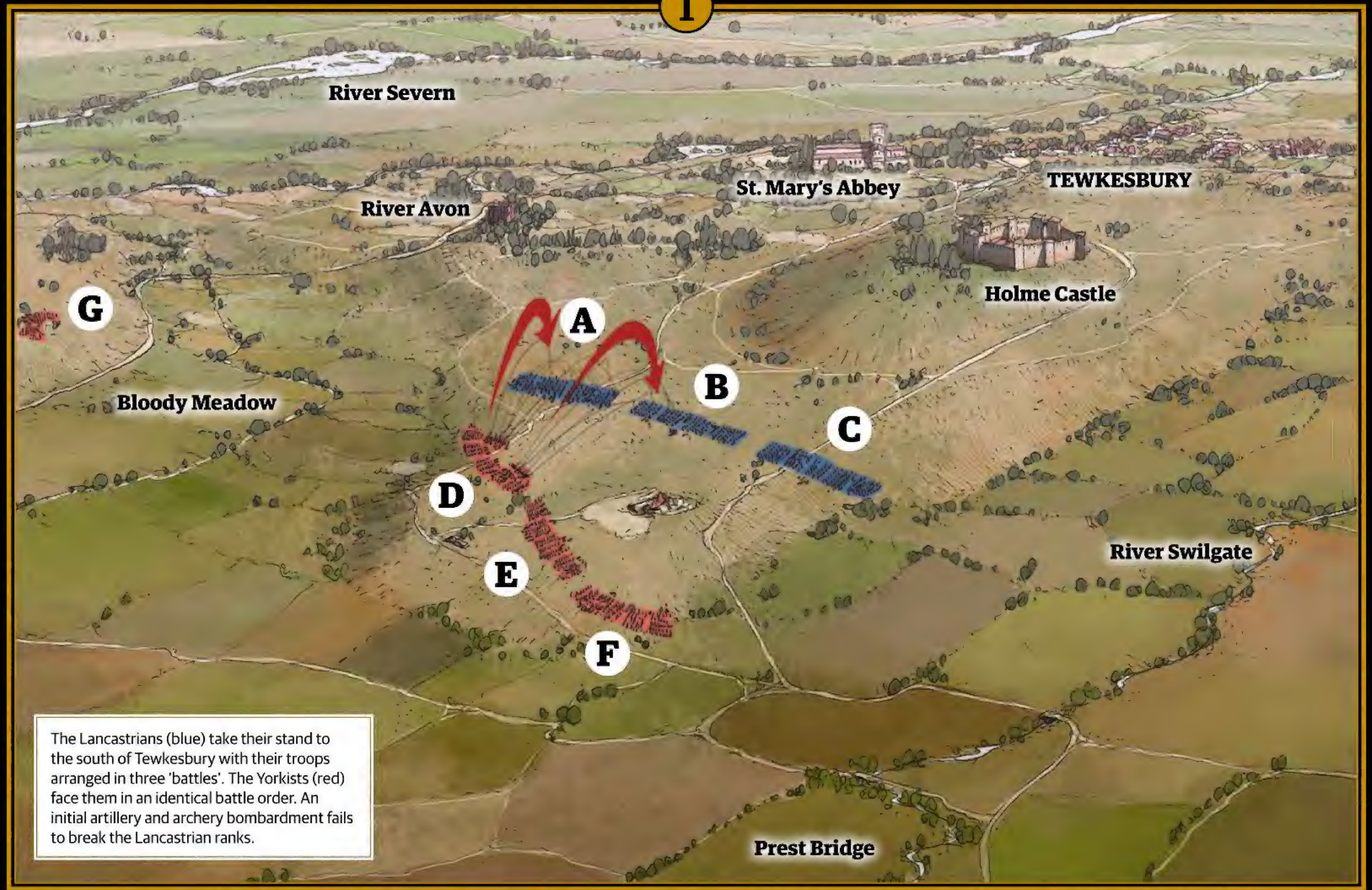
Glittering court
Edward's court was called "the most splendid in all Christendom". He spent lavishly on clothes and jewels, amassed a library of books and built St George's Chapel at Windsor, a masterpiece of Perpendicular Gothic.

Lancastrian nobles that sought sanctuary after the battle were dragged from the churches and executed

Battle of Tewkesbury

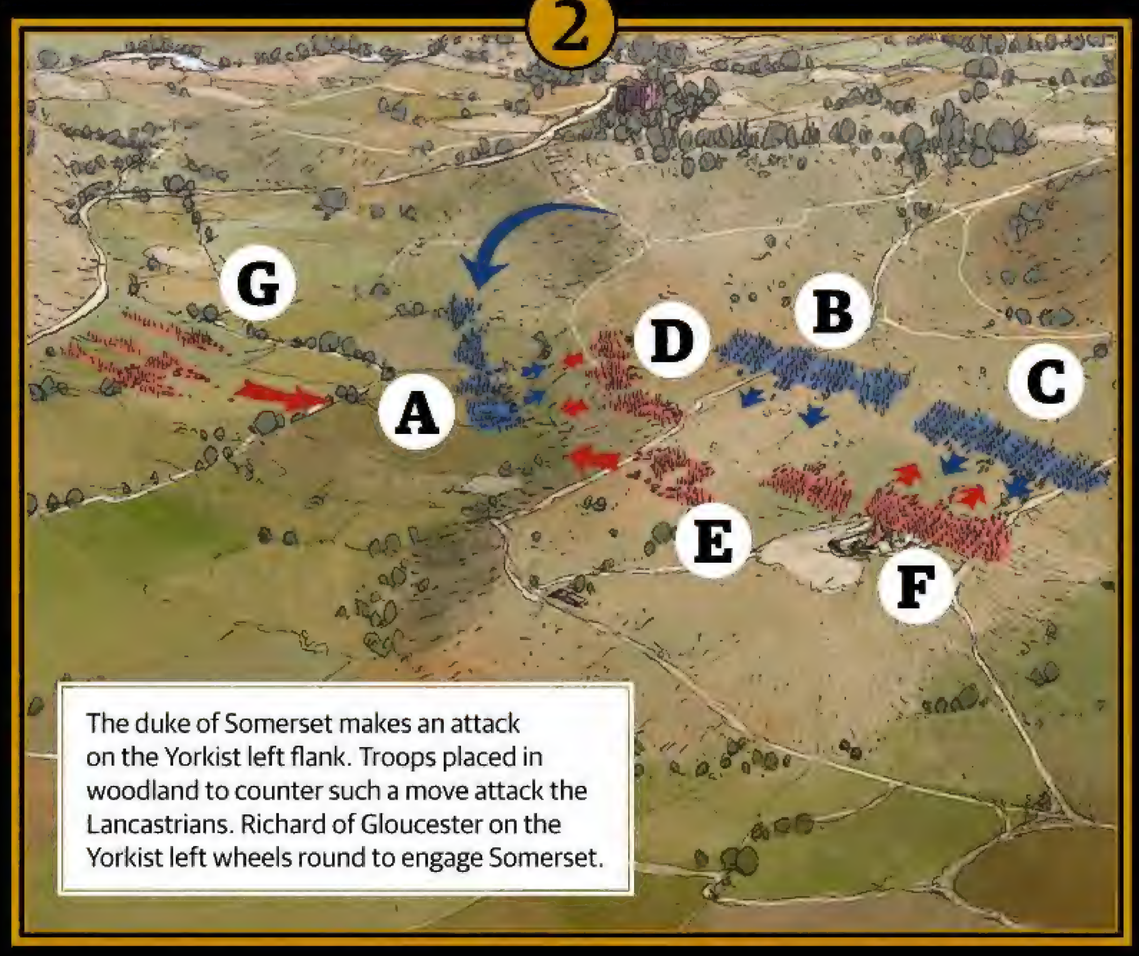
LANCASTRIANS A Somerset B Wenlock C Devon **YORKISTS** D Gloucester E Edward IV F Hastings G Spearman

1



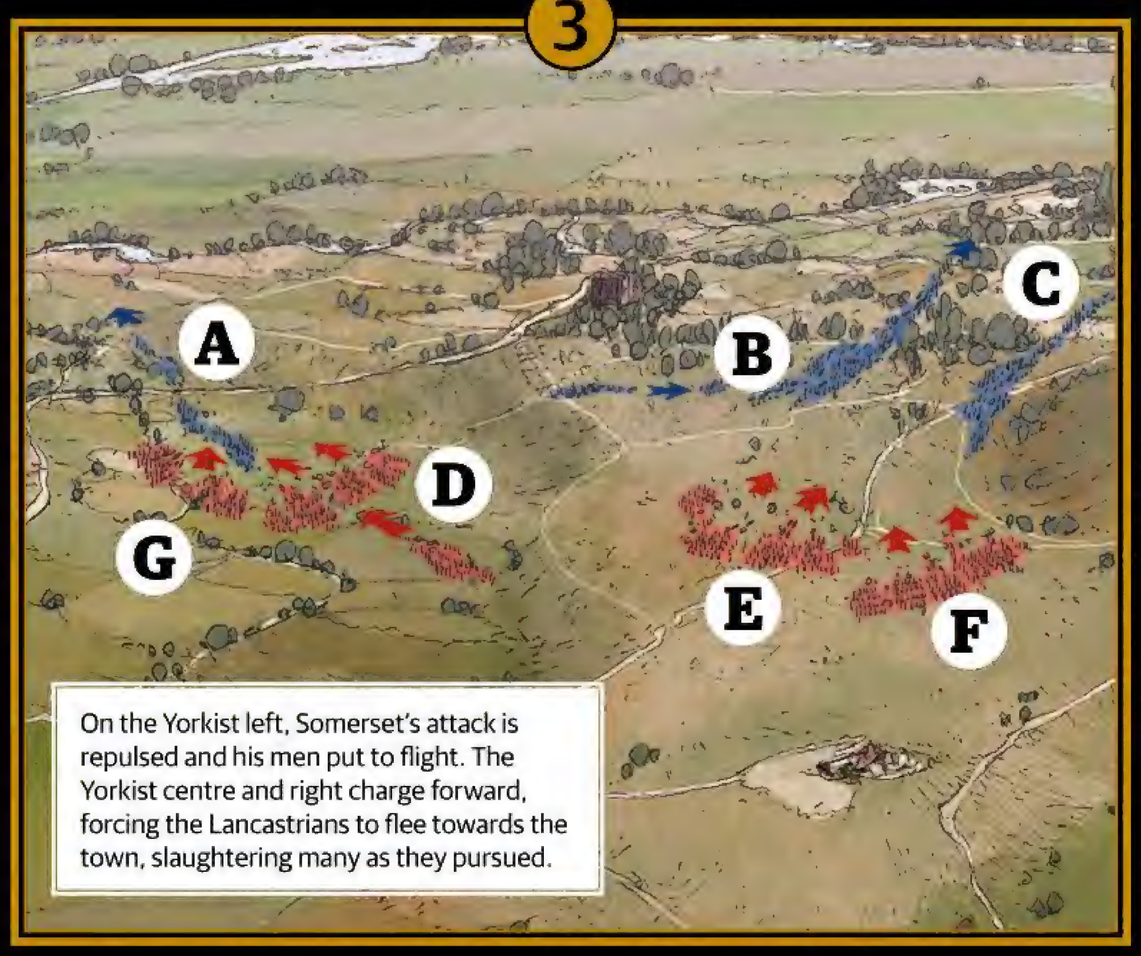
The Lancastrians (blue) take their stand to the south of Tewkesbury with their troops arranged in three 'battles'. The Yorkists (red) face them in an identical battle order. An initial artillery and archery bombardment fails to break the Lancastrian ranks.

2



The duke of Somerset makes an attack on the Yorkist left flank. Troops placed in woodland to counter such a move attack the Lancastrians. Richard of Gloucester on the Yorkist left wheels round to engage Somerset.

3



On the Yorkist left, Somerset's attack is repulsed and his men put to flight. The Yorkist centre and right charge forward, forcing the Lancastrians to flee towards the town, slaughtering many as they pursued.

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CRUSHING THE ENEMIES

Edward of York turned a fortuitous victory into the basis of a permanent triumph

Written by Derek Wilson

'Fortune favours the ruthless' might well have become Edward IV's motto after the chaotic Battle of Barnet. Until then, his energy and determination had been tempered by a generosity of spirit that was not occasioned by mere pragmatism, but the experience of being deposed and forced into exile – plus resentment at the defection of Warwick and Clarence, impressed upon him the sober truth that nothing could be left to chance.

In the immediate aftermath of battle, while the Lancastrians were trying to make their getaway in the mist, Warwick was captured and quickly despatched by his pursuers. Edward sent an urgent message that he was to be spared but it arrived too late. Historians disagree about the his motivation. Some suggest that Edward was hoping for reconciliation. Others believed that he wanted the traitor preserved in order to suffer a public execution, a humiliation that would have satisfied Edward's thirst for vengeance and left no doubt in anyone's mind that Warwick really was dead. Instead of this, he had to be satisfied with displaying the earl's body. It was put on show in Saint Paul's Cathedral for three days.

The victor, now enjoying the support of London, and having Henry VI safely under lock and key in the Tower of London, probably hoped for a respite in which to calculate his next move. He began to disband his army. Queen Margaret, however, forestalled him. She had returned with the aid of the French king with her son, the Lancastrian heir, Prince Edward. They were in charge of an army heading for Wales, where they hoped to

The beheading of the duke of Somerset in the aftermath of the Battle of Tewkesbury

augment their force with Lancastrian supporters from across the border.

The Yorkist triumph could not be complete until every rival claimant to the throne had been disposed of. Edward therefore set off in hot pursuit. Determined to force a battle before his quarry could cross the Severn, he sent messengers to Gloucester (the main bridge) to have the gates barred. Margaret headed for the bridge at Upton-upon-Severn. She and her weary troops got as far as Tewkesbury where she realised she would have to make a stand.

Margaret had a slight superiority in numbers and was able to choose the battleground but she was no match for Edward's charisma and tactical ingenuity. Not only was the Yorkist leader victorious but he also received the added bonus of Prince Edward's death as he was killed in the battle. Several prominent supporters of Henry VI were also slain but enough of them survived to pose a continued threat.

Some, including Edmund Beaufort, self-styled duke of Somerset – his elder brother, Henry, had been executed in 1464 and all his lands and titles had been forfeited by an Act of Attainder that had not been reversed – sought sanctuary in Tewkesbury Abbey. A couple of days later, Edward had them dragged out, peremptorily tried and beheaded. Back in London he made equally short work of his royal rival in the Tower. On 21 May 1471, the very day of Edward's return to the capital, Henry VI was murdered in his chamber. His wife, Margaret of Anjou, was held in honourable captivity for another four and a half years. She no longer posed a threat but she was a useful hostage in Edward's dealings with the French king.

The campaigning was not yet over. While Edward was busy in the west, Warwick's cousin, Thomas Neville, known as the Bastard of Fauconberg, had raised an army in Kent that steadily grew and marched on London. Despite a fierce bombardment, the city held out and remained loyal to the king. Instead of offering battle, Edward made a strike at Sandwich, where Fauconberg's ships and supplies were concentrated. He then pursued the Bastard and captured him in Southampton.

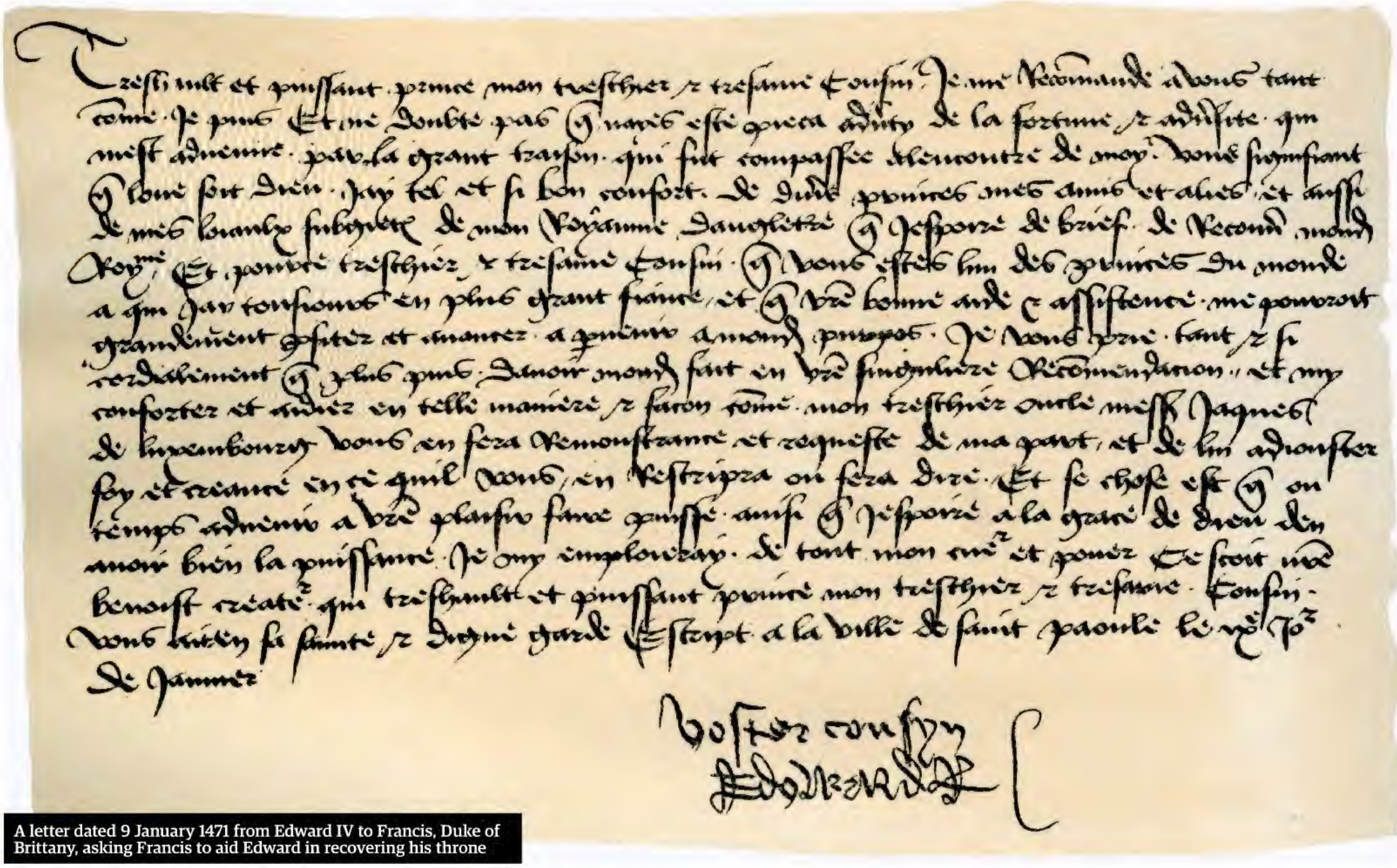
Rather than executing him on the spot, Edward decided to turn the arrest into a major propaganda coup. He had the captive taken to Middleham Castle in Yorkshire, a major Neville family stronghold, and there publicly decapitated. The Bastard's head was then sent to London and set up on London Bridge.

Edward was convinced that demonstrations were necessary because the Lancastrians would simply not lie down and accept defeat. To the diehards, Edward was a usurper and he was conscious that there were enemies among the noble clans throughout the country and that there were men around who could make a claim, whether true or fraudulent, to the throne. This may well be one reason why he surrounded himself with Woodvilles, men raised up by him and having no other clan loyalties.

It is easy to survey Edward's best years – 1471-83 – as years of peace and prosperity. In many ways they were but the man who presided over a nation basking in the sunlight after darkness and bloody chaos was always peering into the shadows to see what might be lurking. This explains the Janus-like image of Edward IV. One face was affable, easy-going and always ready for reconciliation. The other was cunning, devious and ruthless.

One illustration of this is the fate of Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter. This great-grandson of John of Gaunt was married to Edward's sister Anne of York but there was no love lost between the brothers-in-law and Henry gave his allegiance to the Lancastrian king. He served in several of the 'Roses' battles and followed Margaret of Anjou into exile after Towton. The estrangement with

"The more favours the king bestowed on his wife's relatives, the wider the rifts"



A letter dated 9 January 1471 from Edward IV to Francis, Duke of Brittany, asking Francis to aid Edward in recovering his throne

Edward of York was complete. All his lands were seized and his marriage was annulled. He was left for dead on the battlefield at Barnet but recovered and made his peace with the king.

Edward apparently accepted his relative's change of heart and when he went on campaign in France in 1475, Holland had a place in the English contingent. On his way back across the Channel, he 'fell overboard'. There is no evidence that the king was involved in this mishap but it was another loose end neatly tidied up. It is very unlikely that Edward shed any tears.

The story has some similarities with the Clarence tragedy. The divisions in English society were not just between those who aligned themselves with the white rose or the red. Families were split and none more so than the king's. Resentments, rivalries and clashing ambitions distorted relationships between Edward and his siblings. Probably the only thing that George, Richard, Elizabeth and Margaret had in common was a hatred of the Woodvilles. The more favours the king bestowed on his wife's relatives, the wider the rifts became between Edward and his brothers and sisters.

George, Duke of Clarence, was seven years younger than the king, doomed to live in Edward's shadow and, what was more, doomed to live in the shadow of Edward's heir when his son by Elizabeth Woodville inherited the crown. The

George, Duke of Clarence, the younger brother of Edward IV who was later executed

Treaty of Picquigny

Was this settlement a dishonourable peace ending a futile war?

Edward had always nursed the ambition of reversing the humiliation of 1453, when England lost control of the rich province of Gascony in what was the last campaign of the Hundred Years' War. The long conflict with the Lancastrians prevented him giving serious attention to foreign policy. It wasn't until 1473, after having made a couple of false starts, that the king obtained a grant from parliament for a major campaign.

Edward made a treaty with Charles the Bold of Burgundy and Francis II of Brittany for a joint invasion of Louis XI's territory, with the declared object of restoring Plantagenet sovereignty over France. He assembled the largest English army that had been seen for many years and took his commitment very seriously but the same couldn't be said for his Burgundian ally. Charles failed to provide his quota of troops, leaving Edward to face a formidable French force.

Louis took immediate advantage of Edward's predicament. While the English king was consulting with his captains, Louis, also known as 'Louis the Spider' and 'Louis the Cunning', dazzled Edward with the glint of gold. He would pay Edward handsomely to go away and Edward bit. He agreed to abandon his claim to the French throne in return for a downpayment of 75,000 crowns plus a pension of 50,000 crowns for life.

A treaty was signed at Picquigny in August 1475. Five months later, Margaret of Anjou was handed over to Louis for a further payment of 50,000 crowns. This massive boost to the king's finances enabled him to pursue his own policies without parliament for the rest of his reign. But this was at the cost of his reputation. Commentators reported that England's great warrior king had "gone soft" – an opinion endorsed by Richard of Gloucester, who refused to be a party to the treaty.

The English victory at the Battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years' War was a high point and Edward IV sought to reignite the conflict

But was he really the rightful king?

Rumour mills were always working at court

Whether we like it or not, gossip, rumour and innuendo are among the sources available to historians and we are obliged to investigate salacious stories on the grounds that there might be a grain of truth in them. One piece of scandalous tittle-tattle doing the rounds in the later years of Edward's reign was that he was illegitimate. The lurid details were that the king was the result of a liaison between Richard of York's wife, Cecily Neville, and a common-or-garden archer, named Blaybourne. Two main pieces of evidence were offered.

First of all, the fair and uncommonly tall Edward was quite unlike Richard, who was dark and relatively short. Second, at the time of Edward's conception, Richard was away on campaign and distant from his wife.

In 1483, Dominic Mancini offered another item of possible corroboration. He reported that Cecily was so incensed at her son's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville that she flew into a rage and threatened to spill the beans about his paternity. The rumour was freely spread at various times by Warwick, Clarence, Richard III and the Tudor historian Polydore Vergil.

Unfortunately, all these witnesses had a vested interest in undermining Edward's legitimacy, which means that we have to be cautious about taking their testimony at face value. This does not, of course, mean that they were deceived or lying. Therefore, we have to test the two main items of evidence. Edward's dissimilarity to Richard of York is quickly disposed of. The royal siblings George and Anne were also fair and tall for the age.

So, we come back to the question 'Where were husband and wife when Edward was conceived in late July 1441?' Cecily was at Rouen. Richard was at Pontoise, several days' march away, between 14 July and 21 August. Therefore, Edward must have been illegitimate or born prematurely. Either is perfectly possible. That is as far as the known facts can take us. Interested parties – including partisan modern historians – have woven other snippets of information (such as the detail of Edward's christening) into their version of the narrative to support their own theories. Whatever else all this tells us, it underlines the maxim that, whether in the 15th century or the 21st, people have a tendency to believe what they want to believe.

disaffected Warwick had little difficulty in turning the duke against his brother. In 1469, George had married Warwick's elder daughter, Isabel, and joined his father-in-law's defection to the Lancastrian cause. The story was spread abroad that Edward was illegitimate and that George was the senior Yorkist claimant to the throne. Warwick had Clarence named as second in line after Henry VI's own son. However, it didn't take long for George to see through his father-in-law's machinations and he was reunited with the king even before Warwick's death at Barnet.

But there was no real return to the status quo ante. Clarence nursed grievances against his brother – he was dissatisfied with the apportioning of his late father-in-law's estates and believed that the king was still punishing him for his allegiance to Warwick. Whether or not this was true, relations between the brothers continued to deteriorate. When Isabel died in December 1476, Clarence convinced himself that she had been poisoned on the king's instructions. He had the lady-in-waiting who had supposedly administered the fatal drink taken to Warwick where a suborned jury found her guilty and she was hanged straight away. Edward was outraged by this high-handed action but more alarming developments were to follow.

The rich duchy of Burgundy was inherited by Mary on the death of her father, Charles the Bold. Clarence aspired to marry her but Edward forbade it and the estrangement was complete. Clarence quit the royal court. Shortly afterwards, three necromancers were brought to trial for "imagining and encompassing" the death of the king with black arts and it emerged that Clarence was the moving spirit behind this. Edward's patience was at an end. He had his brother removed to the Tower while he, personally, pressed parliament to pass an Act of Attainder.

The death sentence was automatic, though Edward delayed over its implementation. It wasn't until 18 February 1478 that the duke was secretly despatched, though probably not by being drowned in a barrel of Malmsey wine as popular rumour suggested.

One legacy of Clarence's death was the growing enmity of Richard of Gloucester. The two dukes had never seen eye to eye but there is strong evidence that Richard bitterly resented his brother's execution. An Italian visitor, Dominic Mencini, writing in 1483, observed that the duke of Gloucester "was so overcome with grief for his brother... that he was overheard to say that he would one day avenge his brother's death".

Richard laid the blame squarely upon the Woodvilles and the power they wielded over the monarch. Edward's determination to surround himself with his own 'creatures' who would buttress the throne against the power of the aristocratic class whose rivalries had destabilised the kingdom had eventually alienated his own kindred. This disintegration of the royal family from within would eventually lead to total destruction of the Yorkist cause.

While these events were souring the life of Edward's dysfunctional family, he continued to be on the alert against Lancastrian activities. In 1477, an imposter claiming to be John de Vere, Earl of

Oxford – who had actually been executed in 1462 – was exposed at Cambridge. Once again, Clarence had been behind this attempt to destabilise his brother's rule.

But the real threat came from someone who was alive and who did have a claim to the throne – if somewhat tenuous. Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, was descended from Catherine of Valois, the widow of Henry V, and her second husband, Owen Tudor. He also claimed descent via his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, from John of Gaunt. At the age of 14 he was whisked out of his Welsh home after the Battle of Tewkesbury. The intention of his uncle, Jasper Tudor, was to seek asylum in France at the court of Louis XI who supported his kinswoman, Margaret of Anjou. However, contrary winds had forced the escapees to make landfall on the coast of Brittany.

Young Henry thus found himself the guest of Duke Francis II of Brittany – and a pawn in the game of international chess. Louis was eager to gain full control of the far-too-independent Breton dukedom. Edward IV was contemplating a renewal of the Hundred Years' War. The young Welshman could, therefore, be handed over to Edward in return for military aid against France. Alternatively, Francis could threaten to support a Lancastrian invasion if relations between England and France became a little too friendly for his liking.

The ruins of Middleham Castle, the stronghold of the Neville family

Edward IV made many diplomatic attempts to have the earl of Richmond returned but Francis was too cunning to relinquish the advantage that fate had placed in his hands. Henry, therefore, remained in Brittany for 14 years, growing to manhood there while learning the subtle arts of statecraft. His survival prevented the Yorkist king from clearing out all of the potential Lancastrian opposition.

Henry Tudor, the young Welshman over the water, became the golden hope of increasing numbers of the king's enemies. Margaret Beaufort and her friends kept alive the possibility of an alternative to Yorkist rule. That may have seemed a forlorn hope when Edward IV died, after a short illness, on 9 April 1483, bequeathing the crown to his twelve-year-old son. Yet, a real hope it certainly was.

As well as a royal palace, the Tower of London housed high-status prisoners

MURDER IN THE TOWER

When two young princes disappeared more than 500 years ago, it sparked one of the most controversial and debated murder mysteries in history...

Written by Frances White

It was a balmy summer's night in the dark twisting corridors of the Tower of London as Edward and Richard, the two young sons of York, slept soundly. A sob of silver moonlight fell upon their golden hair from a high window, and all was silent. Fast asleep in bed, their hands clutching each other for comfort, they barely stirred as the door opened with a creak.

A figure slipped through the entrance. Stepping lightly, he swept up a feather pillow and slowly approached the beds before lunging forward, firmly holding the pillow over the older boy's face until his breathing stopped. Then he moved to the younger child. In a few minutes the deed was done, and the figure slunk back into the darkness and out of sight.

This story entered the nation's consciousness in late 1483, and it was retold over and over until it was accepted as fact. It was recounted by respected historians and made popular and immortalised by Shakespeare's *Richard III*. But where did this rumour start? Was it really King Richard who masterminded such an atrocious crime? And how did the death of two young children benefit anyone?

The succession to the English throne has never been as precarious and uncertain as in the 15th century. Since 1154, the English crown had belonged to the Plantagenets, but when Edward III died in 1377, he left behind a series of sons that he had gifted with dukedoms. This created a breed of aristocrats who all had distant claims to the throne. Henry IV, the son of the fourth son of Edward III, deposed and most likely murdered his way to the top and formed the House of Lancaster, as well as making a host of enemies in the process. The line seemed to be stable, but thanks to the inefficiency of his grandson, Henry VI, the conflict known as the Wars of the Roses broke out. It led to the eventual succession of the first Yorkist king, Edward IV, but his hold on throne was anything but secure.

Despite the instability and political turmoil, Edward IV was a stronger ruler than his predecessor, and managed to establish some order in England. This all came crashing down in 1483 when he died suddenly, leaving his 12-year-old son, Edward, as king. This wasn't an unprecedented move; children had 'ruled' before, usually through the guidance of regents, but it certainly wasn't ideal with so many would-be heirs snapping at his heels. Edward V was an independent boy; he was mature beyond his years and he had already been preparing to be king, but he was a child in a man's world, and it did not take long for people to take advantage of his fragile position.

While awaiting his coronation ceremony in the Tower of London with his younger brother, Richard of Shrewsbury, the throne was torn from beneath Edward before he even had a chance to sit on it. His father's marriage to his mother was ruled invalid, as he had allegedly been pre-contracted to another beforehand, and their children, including young Edward, were declared illegitimate. Bastards were not judged worthy of the throne, so the crown fell into the hands of the next legitimate heir, his uncle - Richard III.

From this point on, the fate of the princes fades into myth and legend. Their last reported sighting was late summer 1483, and from then the records run dry. They were certainly never seen again in public, and soon rumours began to surface that the young boys had been murdered. There was no evidence that the princes had been killed, save their disappearance, but the search for the culprit has baffled and intrigued scholars for more than 500 years. In 1674, a wooden box containing two small human skeletons was discovered near the White Tower, the suspected site of the boys' burial. Believed to be the remains of the princes, the bones were buried in Westminster Abbey under the order of Charles II. However, these bones have not yet been subject to DNA analysis, and many experts don't believe they belong to the princes at all.

> "The search for the culprit has baffled and intrigued scholars for centuries"

The problem with identifying the children's 'killer' is the era in which the murder supposedly occurred. It was a time when murder and treason were rampant and ambitions were sky high. There is not just one, but an array of possible suspects, all with their own motives for committing the crime. Contemporary accounts are unreliable due to the writer's own political alliances, and all of them contradict other versions of events. Shakespeare's play popularised the figure of Richard III as a scheming, heartless hunchback, willing to murder anyone to secure his throne, but just how accurate is this? Richard had his reasons to do away with the boys, but so did a host of others, and even more people had reason to drag Richard's name through the mud.

Is the common belief that Richard is responsible simply encouraging a vicious rumour created by his enemies some 500 years ago?

Countdown to murder

The final movements before the princes' disappearance

9 April 1483

A king dies

After suffering from a short illness, Edward IV dies. The reason for his death is a mystery, with rumours of a possible poisoning as well as typhoid considered.

24 April 1483

The last journey

His son Edward V and the royal party leave their home at Ludlow to travel to London for his coronation.

4 May 1483

A royal entrance

Edward enters the capital with his uncle, Richard of Gloucester. They are greeted by the mayor and hundreds of citizens.

19 May 1483

Final residence

Edward is moved into the Tower of London, which is the usual place for kings to stay prior to a coronation.

16 June 1483

The brothers reunite

After previously being held with his mother and half-siblings in sanctuary in Westminster, Richard joins his brother at the request of the Duke of Gloucester.

22 June 1483

A new king

Theologian Ralph Shaa preaches a sermon that declares all of Edward IV's children illegitimate. Three days later, Richard is declared king.

End of the summer

Last sighting

The children are withdrawn to the inner apartments of the Tower and are seen less and less. By the end of summer, they are presumed dead.

Suspect 01

RICHARD III

Motive Secure his hold on the throne

Opportunity Full control of and access to the Tower of London

The reasons why Richard would murder his nephews seem rather straightforward. After serving his brother loyally for years, upon his death, the jealous and ambitious Richard seized the opportunity to claim the throne as his own. He first did this by dismissing, arresting and eventually murdering many of the ministers appointed to his nephew, Edward V, claiming that he did so for his protection. He then placed Edward and his brother in the Tower of London and delayed the coronation. Two weeks later, they were declared illegitimate and Richard ascended the throne. Although they had been disenfranchised, keeping the princes alive when they had such a strong claim was too dangerous, so he had them murdered.

If the events were this clear-cut, there would be no question as to who was responsible, but unfortunately they are not. Strictly speaking, Richard didn't take the throne illegally, he was asked to by a parliamentary committee. The only part played by Richard in the bill that declared the boys illegitimate, *Titus Regius*, was accepting it, perhaps indicating that Richard instead was a man who had no choice but to accept his role of king, else face a crisis of royal succession.

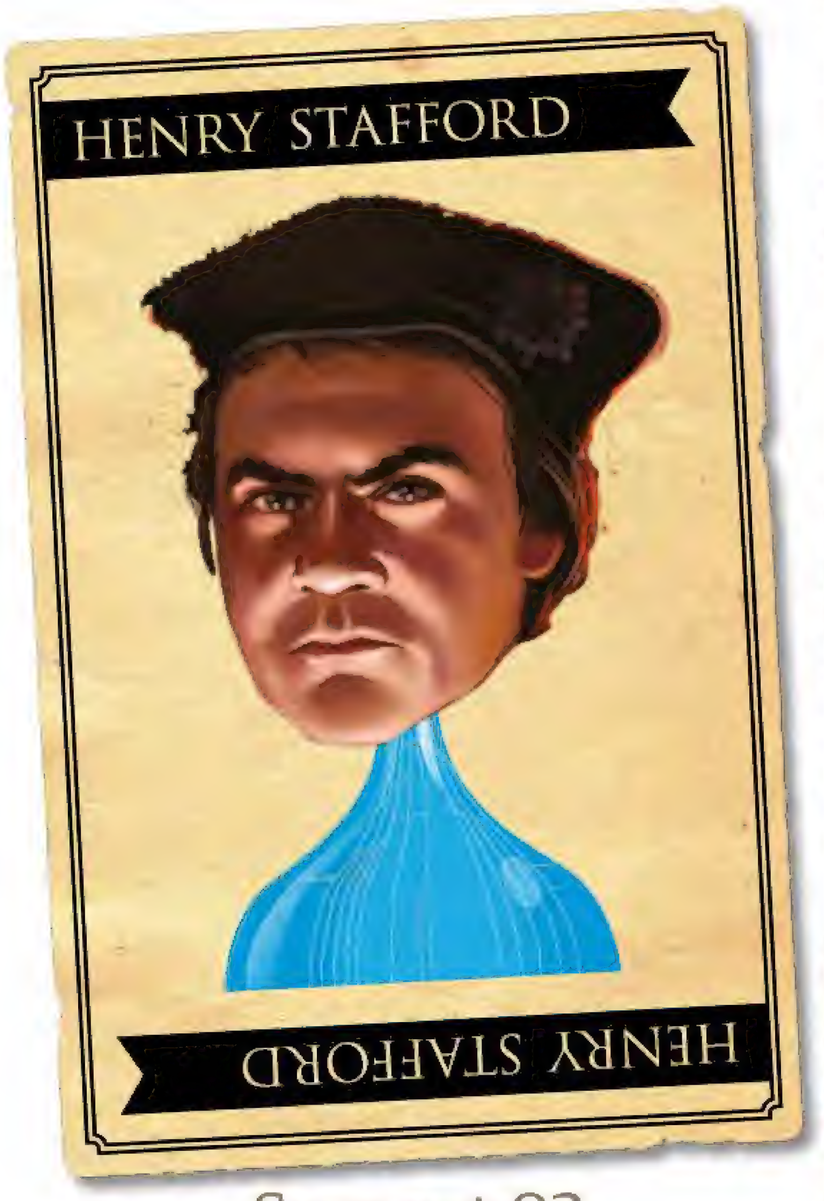
If Richard did indeed murder the princes to secure his own hold on the throne, then why did he not publicise their deaths? He could easily have claimed they died of illness, but he did nothing of the sort. When faced with the vicious rumours that threatened to destroy his reign and certainly lessened the public's support of his claim, he avoided even acknowledging the boys' disappearance. If his motive was to strengthen his grip on the throne, he failed to take advantage of the opportunity he created.

Most crucially, there is no solid evidence that the princes were murdered at all. If people can disappear in the modern day, then it is certainly likely that they could in the 15th century. It is entirely possible that Richard had the boys transported out of the country, and this is the reason why he was unable to easily present them when he faced accusations of their murder. It would also explain the uncertainty that surrounded their fate and the lack of evidence.

For Richard to be innocent, at least one other man had to have been lying - Sir James Tyrell. Tyrell was a loyal servant of Richard III and was bestowed with an array of titles and grants once he was in power. When Henry VII was crowned, Tyrell was initially pardoned for being a supporter of Richard, but in 1501 he was arrested for treason and executed. According to Thomas More, upon 'examination', Tyrell admitted that he had murdered the princes. Although we only have More's word for this, the fact that both King Henry and his wife attended Tyrell's trial - a very unusual event - indicates Tyrell did make this confession. Whether this was forced by torture or was actually true, we may never know - but it had huge implications for his master, Richard, firmly placing the murders at his feet for the next 500 years.

Could Richard III have sent his faithful servant James Tyrell to kill his nephews?

Did Richard III already know the fate of the young princes as he prised them away from their mother?

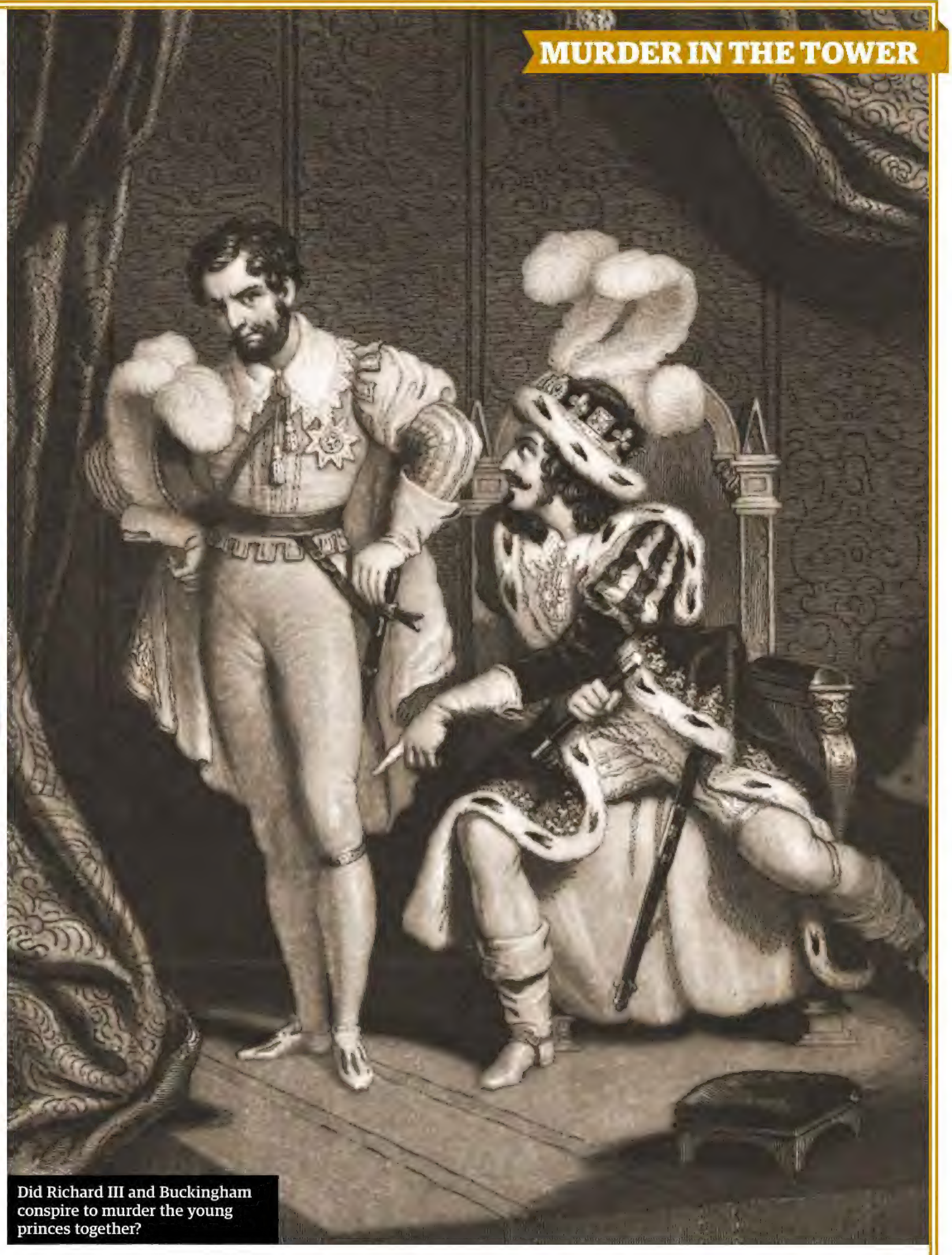


Suspect 02

Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham

Motive: To claim the throne and his lost inheritance

Opportunity: Only possible while under Richard's orders or by forced entry



Did Richard III and Buckingham conspire to murder the young princes together?

After Richard III, the Duke of Buckingham Henry Stafford is one of the earliest suspects for the murder. Buckingham had multiple links to the throne, but these were through the daughters of younger sons, making the chances of him claiming the crown very slim indeed. Despite his family fighting for the House of Lancaster in the Wars of the Roses, he went on to become the ward of Elizabeth Woodville, the wife of Edward IV. He was married to her sister, but this was not a happy union; he considered it an insult to be married to a woman of lower class and resented the Woodvilles from that point onwards. When Richard took guardianship of the young Edward, Buckingham was by his side. But what exactly did the duke have to gain from the princes' deaths?

One suggested motive is Buckingham's interest in the Bohun estate - worth some £1,100 annually. He had inherited the property from his great-great-grandmother Eleanor de Bohun, but Eleanor, and therefore Buckingham, only received half of the estate. Her sister inherited the other half and ended up marrying Henry IV. When Edward IV took the crown, the estate became crown property, but Buckingham insisted it belonged to him.

This desire to reclaim his estate certainly explains why Buckingham supported Richard's ascension, but not why he might have killed the princes, for the simple fact that Richard granted him his inheritance in July 1483, pending parliamentary approval.

Instead, a very common motive for murder is given to Buckingham's actions: ambition. Buckingham had acted as kingmaker for Richard, aligning with him the moment he came into power and guiding his hand to the throne. He was as entangled in the events that led the children to their deathbeds as Richard himself. He held Richard's train and staff on his coronation, perhaps thinking that he may stand in that position soon enough. In order to achieve this, he placed Richard on the throne just to see him fall and killed the princes in the Tower either to begin a vicious rumour against Richard or to eliminate his first stumbling block to the crown. In the autumn of 1483, he unleashed an uprising against Richard that would eventually lead to both men's deaths.

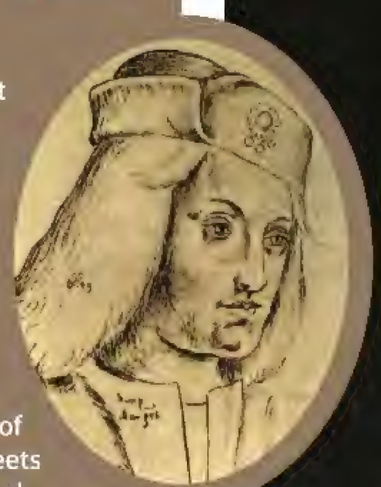
Many have claimed that if he didn't act alone, Buckingham killed the princes on behalf of Richard, and the rebellion was a result of his disillusionment with his new king. It is impossible to prove whether Buckingham was acting out of guilt, ambition or malice when he led his rebellion. However, it seems peculiar that a man who knew the princes were dead would lead a rebellion demanding they be reinstated on the throne.

It was the rumours of their deaths that caused Buckingham to be replaced by Henry Tudor as leader of the rebellion. Perhaps strangest of all is the fact that when Buckingham was captured and tried, Richard did not accuse him of murdering the princes. With Buckingham at his mercy, it would have been the perfect time to implicate him for the murders he was aware he committed, clearing his own name in the process. But he did not.

Pretenders of the throne

The princes' presumed murders didn't stop people coming forward claiming to be them

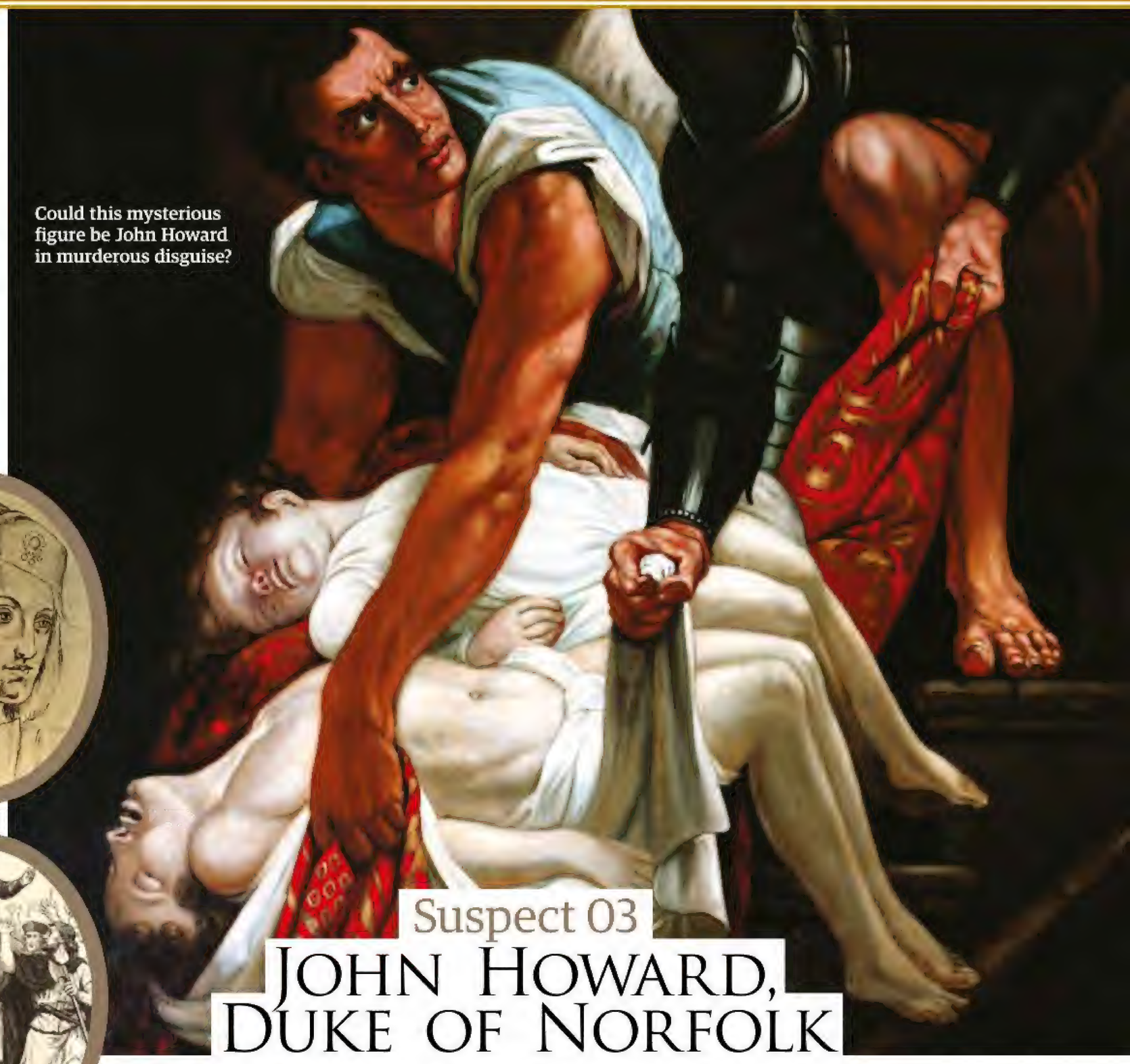
Perkin Warbeck



Warbeck claimed he was Richard in the court of Burgundy in 1490, saying that he had been spared by his brother's murderers due to his young age, but swore to not reveal his identity. His claim was supported by Richard's sister, Margaret of York, and he gained support from various monarchs, most notably James IV of Scotland. However, after hearing the king's army was advancing towards him, he fled. He was eventually captured and taken to the Tower of London after being paraded through the streets to be made an example of. He was imprisoned alongside Edward, Earl of Warwick, the nephew of Edward IV and Richard III, and when the two of them attempted to escape in 1499, he was hanged.

Lambert Simnel

When the young Simnel was taken in by a priest named Richard Simonds, the man noticed the alarming similarity between the boy and the sons of Edward IV. He made plans to present Simnel as Richard, but when he heard that Edward, Earl of Warwick, had died in imprisonment, he changed his claim and declared him as the earl instead. With a rebellion already planned by the Yorkists, Simnel became the figurehead and gained support in Ireland. However, his army was defeated by the kings and due to his young age, Simnel was pardoned and given a job in the royal kitchen.



Could this mysterious figure be John Howard in murderous disguise?

Suspect 03

John Howard, Duke of Norfolk

Motive To claim his rightful inheritance

Opportunity Constable of the Tower at the time

Howard was yet another member of the aristocracy descended from royalty: Edward I on his mother's side and King John on his father's. He was a staunch supporter of the House of York and was knighted by King Edward IV. He slowly made his way up the ranks, even carrying the crown to Richard III at his coronation.

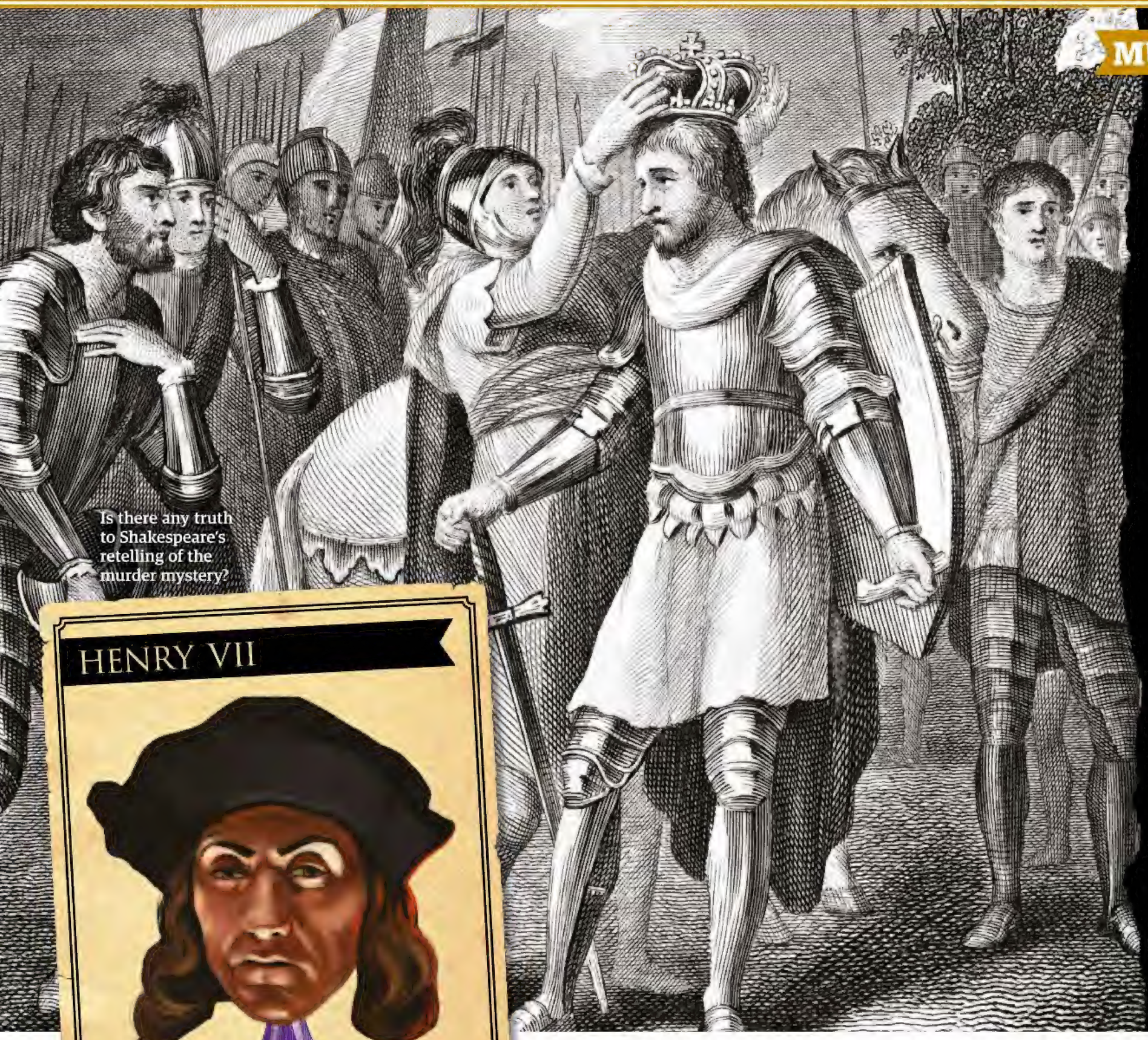
Howard's support of Richard alone isn't enough to accuse him of murder, but the benefits he apparently reaped because of his ascension certainly are. Just two days into Richard's reign, Howard received the lands and titles held by Richard of Shrewsbury. These lands, the 'Mowbray inheritance', had been given to Richard as 'compensation' after the death of his betrothed. This meant Howard was denied his inheritance, and had not been compensated at all for this loss.

Adding to this theory is the fact that it was Howard who encouraged placing Richard in the Tower with his brother – the Tower he was constable of. He was also devoted to Richard III, even dying on the same field as his king. If he had not acted alone to secure his fortunes, it is not impossible to believe he acted alongside the king – agreeing to do away with the boys as both a favour and a means to claim what was rightfully his.

> "Howard encouraged placing Richard in the Tower with his brother"

It seems Howard had both the means and the motive to commit the act, but this theory actually falls apart under closer scrutiny. Howard was not the all-powerful constable of the Tower – he held the second reversion of the post, making it unlikely he could do as he wished there. In this case, we have to believe that Richard allowed Howard access to the Tower, but in reality their friendship was not as great as it seemed. It is more likely that Howard's commitment was to the House of York, which had helped him ascend the social and political ladder, rather than to Richard himself. Such loyalty to a house at this time was a remarkable thing, and it is a little cynical to assume its source was shared blame for murder.

Most damning of all is his motive. If he did indeed wish to claim his lands and titles, he would have only had to kill the current owner – Richard of Shrewsbury. Why, then, would he also kill Edward V? The entire argument falls apart if we consider Howard only had 12 days to do away with them – the time between Richard's arrival at the Tower and when Howard was granted his estate. But both princes were reportedly seen after this date. Considering he had his title when they were seen alive, Howard really had no reason to kill them.



Is there any truth to Shakespeare's retelling of the murder mystery?

A deadly rumour

Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII's mother, is another name that has been linked to the murders, but a more compelling theory is that although she didn't kill them, she began the rumour that Richard did. With her focus on the interests of her son, Beaufort enlisted the help of Woodville and Buckingham to drive the autumn rebellion and place her son on the throne. The rumour of the boys' deaths and Richard's connection to it certainly started a domino effect that led to Henry VII's rule, and this very well may have been due to his mother, as the ultimate spin master, working behind the scenes to tarnish Richard's name and prompt people to flock to her son's side.

Suspect 04

Henry VII

Motive Secure his hold on the throne

Opportunity Access to the Tower upon becoming king

When Henry VII set his sights on the English crown, his claim was incredibly weak; there were almost 30 nobles with a more credible claim. He knew ascension would not happen through birthright, but instead conquest, and to achieve this he needed allies. He vowed to marry Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV and elder sister to the two princes. By doing this, he gained the support of Lancastrians as well as disenfranchised Yorkists unhappy with Richard's reign.

But once he became king after Bosworth and was set to marry Elizabeth, he encountered a problem. Richard III had declared Edward IV's children illegitimate in *Titus Regius*. Now that Henry was king, he could easily overturn it, which he did - even burning all copies to deny it ever existed. Although this returned legitimacy to his wife-to-be, it also meant the princes were the legal claimants to the throne. This left Henry with no choice - he had to have the princes killed, or lose his throne. It is argued that this happened not in 1483, as commonly believed, but in 1486.

> "He had to have the princes killed, or lose his throne"

This date is supported by Tyrell's confession, as he received two pardons from Henry in 1486. This is an unusual occurrence, and Henry would later proclaim that Tyrell had indeed confessed to the murders - and as Tyrell was Richard's loyal servant, it was easy for him to shift the blame on his predecessor. This theory is also supported by Henry's treatment of the princes' mother, Elizabeth Woodville, who was deprived of her lands and fees.

It is no secret that Henry made efforts to wipe out remaining Plantagenets, but it seems very unlikely that nobody would have mentioned the boys if they had survived three years longer than previously believed. For the early part of his reign, Henry faced constant rebellions from angry Yorkists; it is difficult to believe none of them would have accused him of this crime had it occurred during his time on the throne. Additionally, if they had survived until this date, why did Richard III not previously display them after being accused of their murder? This would have helped redeem his reputation and likely quell the rebellion, but he did not. It is also similarly unlikely that Elizabeth Woodville would have supported Henry's claim to the throne, as she did by agreeing to his marriage with her daughter, had she known her sons were still alive.

Most revealing of all is Henry's reaction when pretenders of the princes emerged. When Perkin Warbeck claimed to be the young Richard, Henry was so worried that he made peace with France to prevent a rebellion. His actions were those of a nervous man, unlike his confident response when Lambert Simnel emerged posing as the Earl of Warwick, who Henry knew was locked up in the Tower. This is a telling indication that Henry had no idea what happened to the princes. Considering Henry was 14 when he left England and didn't return until the Battle of Bosworth, it is more likely that Henry knew less about their fate than most; he never accused Richard of the act for exactly that reason. All Henry could do was assume and hope, for the sake of his throne, that they were dead.

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RICARDVS . REX .
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RICHARD III
ENGLAND'S LOST KING

Was the last of the Plantagenet dynasty a saint or a tyrant? The truth is much more complex...

Written by Derek Wilson

What is a king or a queen? There is no simple answer to this question – or, rather, there are several answers and they are constantly changing. It is important to keep this in mind when forming judgements of individual rulers. They can only be fairly assessed in the light of contemporary beliefs and ideas. Two fundamental questions we need to ask are, 'What did this ruler think he or she should be doing?' and 'What did their subjects think he or she should be doing?'

It is ironic that some of the fiercest arguments about what constitutes a good king have, for centuries, raged around the reputation of the monarch who had the shortest reign in the last thousand years of English history (excluding Edward V, Lady Jane Grey and Edward VIII, who were proclaimed but never crowned). No reputation has suffered more than that of Richard III from the romantic adulation or vituperative condemnation of commentators viewing it from the moral high ground of later ages. Richard has been labelled an ambitious child-murderer, as well as an enlightened ruler viciously libelled by his enemies. Yet this is a man who ruled for a mere 777 days. There is not enough evidence for us to conclude whether the last Plantagenet was a good king or to even decide what kind of a king he would have been given more time. However, his chequered, sanguinary

The Rous Roll

The historian John Rous (died 1491) was a chantry priest at Guy's Cliffe, a hamlet near Warwick. He devoted much of his time to commemorating the benefactors of Warwick, and illustrating his text with their heraldic devices. This magnificent parchment roll was the work of more than one hand but "laburd & finishid by Master John Rows of Warrewyk" (circa 1483). This panel depicts Richard, his queen and his son, Prince Edward, with helms including those of England, Wales, Ireland and France, and also the White Boar and the Bear of Warwick.

and tragic career might enable us to throw light on a more important question: what did rulers and their subjects understand by 'kingship' in those last years of Medieval England?

Richard was born in 1452 at Fotheringhay Castle in Northamptonshire, a location with an ominous air. It was here that Henry VIII's discarded queen, Catherine of Aragon, would be obliged to live out her last years and, later, it witnessed the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Such events were far in the future, but England's royals had problems of their own in the mid-15th century. Richard was still an infant when the Wars of the Roses began. He would never know an England fully at peace. By the time of his death 33 years later, 16 major battles and skirmishes had been fought between partisans of the House of Lancaster and the House of York. Theoretically, the conflict was about legitimacy, and England's major landholders took sides in support of the candidate they regarded as having the strongest claim. In reality, of course, the reasons for this series of baronial wars were more complex. They involved family and feudal affiliation, economic grievances, land ownership and territorial ambition. Many participants changed sides in pursuit of personal advantage. The battles of these dislocated years cannot be thought of as heroic, manly clashes of men-at-arms disporting themselves on spirited chargers and brandishing bravely fluttering heraldic banners. England was ungoverned and ungovernable and its people, at all social levels, suffered mightily.

> *"...in divers parts of this realm, great abominable murders, robberies, extortions, oppressions and other manifold maintainences, misgovernances, forcible entries... affrays, assaults, be committed and done by such persons as either be of great might, or else favoured under persons of great power, in such wise that their outrageous demerits as yet remain unpunished, insomuch that of late divers persons have been slain..."*

So complained the House of Commons in the Parliament Rolls - the Rotuli Parliamentorum - 1459, deploring the failure of the royal courts of justice to resist the pressures brought to bear on them by the nobles and their bully boys. England needed strong leadership - and that was precisely what it did not have.

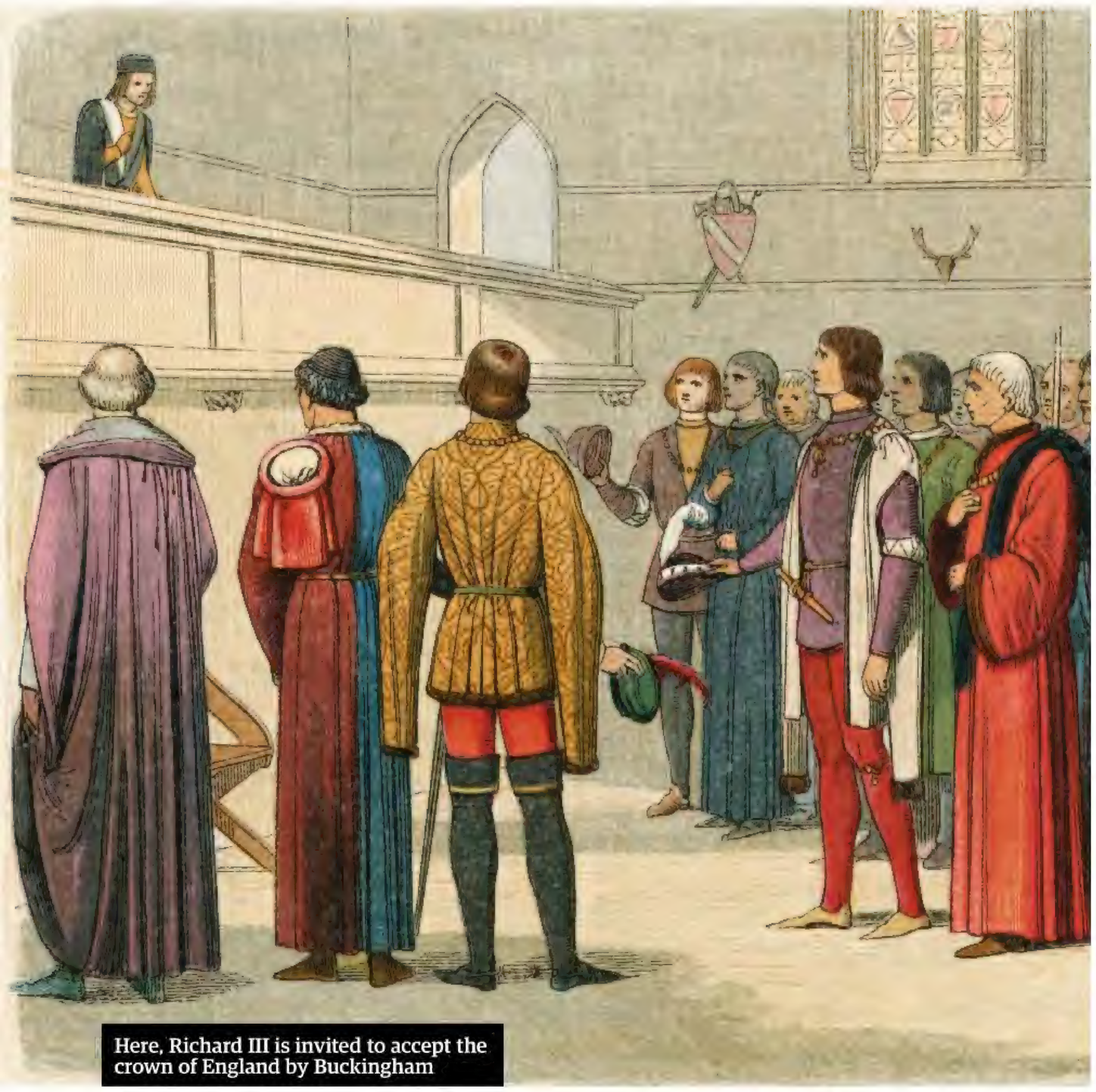
> "Richard embarked on a process of eliminating all opponents - real and assumed"

When Richard was seven, his father was slain at the Battle of Wakefield and one of his brothers was executed in its aftermath. He was spirited out of the country to a haven in Burgundy. The Lancastrian victory had been won in the name of Henry VI, a man more fitted to be a monk than a king. Yorkist hopes now centred on Richard's eldest brother, Edward. But would he make a better job of kingship than Henry? Only time would tell. Another 11 years of fluctuating military fortunes would pass before Edward was able to take his place securely on the English throne. He had his rival locked in the Tower of London, where he was killed. Since Henry's heir, Edward, Prince of Wales, had been killed in battle, Edward IV could claim that God had vindicated the Yorkist cause, confirming the legitimacy of the dynasty by victory in battle. Edward was king by divine right and popular acclamation. He was 'big' both in stature and personality. He was almost two metres tall with the build to go with this prodigious height, and in him, the ferocious warrior king and the cultured sensitive monarch came together in a rare combination. Richard, now Duke of Gloucester, was second in line to the throne after his elder brother George, Duke of Clarence.

The Lancastrian cause was kept alive but its claim to legitimacy hung by the slenderest of threads. The Lancastrian nominee, Henry Tudor, was not of the blood royal, being descended from the widow of King Henry V, and he was now in precarious exile in Brittany.

After 1475, the king had little to fear from the Lancastrians. His campaigning days were over and his health deteriorated. Security did not bring out the best in Edward. He allowed his passions full rein, becoming at once a voluptuary and a tyrant. His athletic frame ran to fat. He spent his time between the sumptuous residences he had built or extended close to the capital. These splendours were largely financed out of the property confiscated from his enemies and taxes and fines he imposed both to fill the treasury and deter potential opposition. The prudent monarch who had prided himself on his willingness to pardon the offences of opponents now reinforced his authority by manipulating the law as he stamped out the last embers of opposition.

His most notorious act was the impeachment of his brother, George, for treason. There is no doubt Clarence deserved his sentence. He had



Here, Richard III is invited to accept the crown of England by Buckingham

The death of Anne Neville in 1485 apparently caused Richard III great distress

repeatedly plotted with Edward's enemies and made no secret of his hostility towards the queen and her family. But Edward personally and fiercely browbeat parliament to condemn the duke by Act of Attainder (against which there could be no defence) and then had him executed privately within the confines of the Tower. The *Croyland Chronicle* changed its verdict on the regime:

> *"After the perpetration of this deed, many persons left King Edward, fully persuaded that he would be able to lord it over the whole kingdom at his will and pleasure... The king... appeared to be dreaded by all his subjects while he himself stood in fear of no one."*

This was the pattern of kingship with which the teenage Richard of Gloucester grew up. In his earlier years, the bond between the royal brothers was strong (and made stronger by their shared mistrust of Clarence). Richard was groomed to participate in the political and military activities of the government. Edward bestowed upon him lands, titles and responsibilities. Before he reached the age of 20, he was constable of England, lord high admiral and governor of the North. Grants of property and – crucially – castles beyond the Humber made him the biggest landowner in the potentially troublesome shires far from the capital, and by property deals and exchanges, he added consistently to his northern holdings. Richard fought valiantly and effectively, not only against Lancastrian forces at home, but also in France and Scotland. His commitment to the Crown was total. There can be no doubt that without his support, Edward would have been unable to bring all England under his sway, and it is worth pointing out that, until the death of Clarence, Richard had not the slightest prospect of inheriting the crown.

But he and his brother were cut from different cloth. Richard was small of stature and with a slight spinal deformity. He could scarcely impress friend or foe with his physical presence. He was of a serious cast of mind, self-disciplined, hard working and more than usually pious for his times. A later age might have dubbed him 'puritanical'. Shakespeare came close to the truth when he made his stage Richard display contempt for "sportive tricks", "the lascivious pleasing of a lute" and the vanity that craves "an amorous looking-glass". He was a man of action rather than a contemplative. He was sparing in his appetites. Observers noted that he ate and drank little at feasts. When he became king, he did not emulate his brother by establishing a glittering court, displaying all that was best in cultural refinement.

On the continent, the Renaissance was dawning. Enlightened princes, nobles, churchmen and merchants rivalled one another in their patronage of painters, musicians, poets and scholars. This was not Richard's style. It could reasonably be argued that, during his brief reign, he had no time or leisure to cultivate the arts of peace but he had had a long preparation in the years before when he ruled most of northern England as a quasi-monarch. It is legitimate to include an assessment of his activities there in any overall picture we may form of his exercise of power. No contemporary chronicles claim for him any artistic sensitivity or deep interest in scholarship. This does not mean he was an empty-headed boor. On the contrary; one foreign diplomat to discerned "so great a mind in so small a body". He was particularly well versed in the law and could argue cases with skill. He was profoundly interested in heraldry and founded the College of Arms by royal charter in 1484. This concentration on legal process and heraldic detail reveal Richard's essential motivation: he was focused on the responsibility to rule – and rule effectively. Armorial panoply and the splendour of royal ceremonial gave visual expression to the authority of the monarch and the loyalty he demanded of his magnates, firmly founded on law.

At the root of Richard's public and private life was a genuine, if conventional, piety. He made more religious endowments than any other Medieval king. He regarded York as his 'capital' and the Minster was the major recipient of his generosity. Among his lavish gifts were silver and gilt altar

The Council of the North

As Duke of Gloucester, the future Richard III faced his first test of governance

The government Richard developed in the northern counties was his major administrative legacy and gives some idea of the kind of national regime he might have established given time. The lands towards the border were difficult to control because of their distance from London, sporadic Scottish raids and feuds between the powerful magnates who dominated the region (the Percys, Nevilles and their allies).

In order to bring the area under royal control, Edward IV set up the Council of the North in 1472 with Richard of Gloucester as lord president. Richard had become the most powerful northern magnate through grants of property, stewardship of castles and purchase. When the rebel Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick was killed in battle in 1471, Edward bestowed much of his patrimony on his brother. Richard added to this by marrying one of Warwick's daughters. Now that the reality of power lay in the hands of the king's deputy, an administrative body was set up to establish permanent royal control beyond the Humber.

The Council of the North was essentially a court of law for settlement of disputes impartially and the establishment of peace, security and economic stability. In 1484, the new king increased the council's personnel, installed his nephew, John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, as president and laid down detailed instructions for the body, which was to meet in the royal manor of St Mary's, York, as an extension of the king's Council, to which any matters beyond its competence were referred. The council remained in existence until 1641.

Prominent Landholders

Coins that depict the monarch are a valuable find, particularly ones that clearly show Richard

ornaments, decorated copes and a bejewelled processional cross. He planned to build in the cathedral complex a college (a religious guild, not an educational establishment) where 100 priests would daily say masses for Richard and his family. Similar, smaller institutions were proposed for Barnard Castle and Middleham. The king also bestowed land and money on Wilberfoss Nunnery among other religious sites. One educational establishment to become a recipient of Richard's bounty was Queens' College, Cambridge, which received endowments in 1477 and 1484. The college still has the right to a badge displaying Richard's boar emblem on a cross and a crozier.

The accumulation of disastrous events that marked the last 28 months of Richard's life began with the death of Edward IV in April 1483. The security his strong rule had provided went to the grave with him. The immediate reaction was to set the political and kindred networks among the nobility quivering. That threatened a return to dynastic intrigue and military conflict. The late king was succeeded by his 12-year-old son, Edward V, and had decreed that Richard was to act as protector of the realm until the boy's coming of age. But thereafter, uncertainty loomed. The young king was very attached to his mother and uncles, so the smart money was on the ascendancy of the Woodvilles. Several of the realm's movers and shakers were alarmed at the prospect - and Richard was one of them. To add to the precarious situation, Lancastrian hopes received a boost. Henry Tudor, from his exile in Brittany, was in touch with supporters across the Channel, some of whom now visited him to pledge their swords.

Amid the swirling fog of rebellion, murder and treachery that spread over the land (not to mention the obfuscating clouds of romanticising

The ruins of Sandal Castle as they appear today, situated just outside the City of Wakefield overlooking the River Calder

The strongholds of the north

Castles were the administrative and military centres from which northern England was controlled. Some were the strongholds used by great magnates to resist royal 'interference'. Others were the bases from which kings asserted control of over-mighty subjects. Middleham Castle, which Richard inherited through his wife, became his principal residence. Sandal Castle had a particular significance for Richard. It was from here that his father rode to his death at the Battle of Wakefield in 1460, and Sandal was the first seat of the Council of the North.

partisanship contributed by later writers) two facts stand out clearly. The first is that Richard grasped the initiative, behaving with ruthless logic to maintain stability. The second is that, despite this, events developed their own momentum that he was unable to halt.

The old king's death was followed by days of confusion. The divided royal council was uncertain to whom custody of Edward V and his younger brother should be granted. Richard was in no doubt. He claimed the protectorate without waiting for it to be confirmed. He intercepted Earl Rivers, who was en route for London with the new king, and had the royal brothers installed in the palace quarters at the Tower. Rivers and his associates were taken north to Pontefract Castle where, two months later they were executed for treason against the protector. It was a pre-emptive strike, the sort made by a practiced military strategist, and there may well have been reason for it. Though unlawful, it was prudent. The Woodvilles must also have been taking stock of the political situation and deciding how best to secure their position. Unfortunately for them, Richard acted first.

Once committed, there was no going back. Richard embarked on a process of eliminating all opponents - real and assumed. He had entered a dangerous game in which the consequences of losing would be fatal. England's political elite were faced with a clear choice: they could be ruled by Richard or the Woodville faction or the Lancastrian claimant over the water. The protector's prompt manoeuvres had secured his position in the short term but his bloodthirsty deeds frightened former friends. By late June, he had brought military resources down from the North, tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Duke of Brittany to surrender Henry Tudor and made the shocking 'revelation' that Edward V was not, in fact, king, because Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville was null and void by virtue of his pre-contract to another woman. Little Edward and his brother were, he claimed, bastards. The only rightful heir to the throne was himself. A well-drilled assembly of London notables petitioned him to take the crown and his lavish coronation took place on 6 July.

By the autumn, pockets of disaffection were appearing. Richard's one-time supporter, the Duke of Buckingham, had made a pact with Henry Tudor, which only failed because storms prevented the Lancastrian from landing on the south coast. By now it was being widely rumoured that Richard had murdered his nephews. It seemed to many like poetic justice when Richard's only son and heir died the following April.

Within a year, his wife was also dead. Still the king continued to do what he conceived to be his duty. He travelled the country, keeping court, administering royal justice. The contemporary chronicler, John Rous, wrote of Richard that:

> *"he ruled his subjects in his realm full commendably, punishing offenders of his laws... and cherishing those that were virtuous..."*

The *Croyland Chronicle* tells us that the king welcomed the invasion of Henry Tudor. All would now be settled in manly combat - something in which he was well versed. He doubted not that God would vindicate him in battle and that thereafter he would be able to "comfort his people with the blessings of unchallenged peace." He did not deviate from this conviction and was cut down at Bosworth only yards from his adversary. The rest is history.

More is the pity. For of all English monarchs, none has had his reputation more raked over by historians, biographers and romanticisers. Bias and distortion started immediately. John Rous, who had so warmly endorsed Richard's style of kingship, reversed his judgment as soon as Henry Tudor ascended the throne, excoriating Richard as a deformed monster who had murdered his own wife. Thomas More and Shakespeare built on this legend. With the passage of time, other writers became witnesses for the defence or the prosecution in the trial of the last Plantagenet. In 1768, Horace Walpole cried "a plague on all your houses". Referring to the works of Thomas More and Francis Bacon, he wrote in *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III*:

> *"two of the greatest men in our annals have prostituted their admirable pens, the one to blacken a great prince, the other to varnish a pitiable tyrant. It is a judgement I warm to."*

When dealing with such a complex character who lived in such complex times, we must put away the pots of white and black paint - unless it be to create shades of grey. If we make moral judgements based on some timeless standard, we get things hopelessly wrong. If we try to see Richard in his contemporary context, we stand a chance of understanding the man and his times.

Richard III lived in a fractured nation and knew he had the responsibility to establish peace. He was responsible to the people, who wanted to get on with their lives within a framework of just laws and security. He was responsible to God, whose agent he was and, like the King of Kings, he had to inspire love and dread. To meet these responsibilities, he had to do things that, in other mortals, would be described as cruel, capricious and diabolical. In 1484, he wrote this mission statement for his bishops:

> *"...our principal intent and fervent desire is to see virtue and cleanness of living to be advanced, increased and multiplied, and vices and all other things repugnant to virtue, provoking the high indignation and fearful displeasure of God to be repressed and annulled..."*

This was not hypocritical hogwash. Richard was a clear-thinking and industrious ruler who understood what needed to be done. Kingship was a solemn charge from God and its purpose was the wellbeing of the people. The divinely anointed monarch had to have the conviction that he knew what was best for his subjects and the courage to pursue what he believed was right. To be irresolute, like Henry VI, was a disaster. To be distracted by personal vices, like Edward IV, was a betrayal of trust. To be a child, like Edward V, and therefore under the direction of advisers with their own agendas, was a sad misfortune. Thus Richard believed and thus he justified to himself the seizure of the crown.

If the fragments we can collect about his character allow us to draw up a psychological profile, what they suggest is a man with ice in his veins; a man with a sacred calling, a vocation, demanding tireless effort, unflinching determination and self-sacrifice. Richard was a disciple - and a victim - of duty. He had the enormous problem of keeping the peace achieved by his brother. Of course, he was part of that problem. His high ideals could only be realised through acts, many of which were base.

But what did the people think of their new guardian and defender? Apart from the nobles and their retainers who were voting with their feet, the only body whose reaction we can consider

This 1864 engraving by JWE Doyle depicts the Battle of Bosworth where Richard III met his demise

The white boar

This was Richard's personal badge, a token he issued to supporters and liveried servants to be worn as a sign of their allegiance. Its origin is obscure. It may have already been part of royal insignia associated with the feudal lordship of Windsor.

Equally, it may have been a punning reference to 'Ebor', the Latin word for 'York'. Few examples survived the king's overthrow. Queens' College, Cambridge preserves a version in acknowledgement of Richard's benefaction and a silver-gilt boar badge was found close to the Bosworth battle site back in 2009.

Middleham Castle became the home of Richard III after marrying Anne Neville

is parliament. This national assembly met only once during the brief reign, from 23 January to 20 February 1484. Lords and Commons endorsed the Titulus Regius, setting out the reasons for Richard's usurpation. About the attainders of the king's leading enemies they were more nervous, though eventually compliant. The most compelling reason for any king to summon parliament was his need for money. Richard was no exception. The people's representatives granted him the customary rights to levy customs and excise duties. But they demanded quid pro quos. Richard graciously conceded reforms in matters of taxation, trade regulations and the operation of law courts. The remarkable fact about all this is that it is not remarkable. As far as the representatives of the people were concerned, it was business as usual.

That helps us to see Richard III in perspective. Had he not been the last of the Plantagenets and had 1485 not come to be regarded as a turning point in English history, the events of the previous few months would have merged into the narrative of what was a turbulent century. Richard would have been seen as a king struggling to contain the ambitions of his barons - as his predecessors had done. He would have been recognised as a ruler whose legitimacy and divine vocation sanctioned bloody acts - just as they had for his forbears. He was not an innovator. He was a man of his times, and it is as such that we must judge him.

A witness to history

The Croyland Chronicle is a valuable historical source, but is it entirely trustworthy?

This, the most valuable primary source available for the brief reign of Richard III, was written in the Lincolnshire abbey of Croyland between 655-1485. The author, whose contribution was written in 1486, is usually referred to as 'the Second Continuator'. Historians are indebted to this anonymous author, but his work was not the kind of objective account we would expect from a modern scholar, so we must to ask, 'Who was he?' and 'What was his agenda?'

According to the text, the Second Continuator was an experienced diplomat and onetime member of Edward IV's council. The most likely contender is John Russell, Bishop of Rochester, and former lord chancellor, or a member of his entourage. This means he had a detailed knowledge of events at the royal court. But did he distort his account of those events? Russell was dismissed as chancellor on 29 July 1485, possibly on suspicion of being a secret supporter of Henry Tudor. A few months later, by which time Henry was on the throne, the account of the late king's last months was written. If the author was Russell, did he have an axe to grind and, whoever the author was, did he frame his account in a way to please the new regime? We have more questions than answers.

We must bear in mind the fact that the *Croyland Chronicle* was a monastic chronicle. Not only was it concerned with the affairs of the abbey, it also took a moral and religious stance. In recording the death of Richard's son and heir, the author observed: "In a short time after, it was fully seen how vain are the thoughts of a man who desires to establish his interests without the aid of God." The Continuator was a professional man of God who believed that the Almighty was involved in the tragedies and triumphs of kings. We do not have to regard him as politically partisan for pointing this out.

DAVID GARRICK AS RICHARD III

Artist: William Hogarth

Painted by the acclaimed British artist William Hogarth, this scene depicts actor David Garrick in the role of King Richard III in Shakespeare's play of the same name. In this particular scene from Act V Scene 3 on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth, Richard III has just awoken from a dream haunted by the ghosts of those he murdered, only to realise upon waking that his own death is imminent.

1745

DAVID GARRICK AS RICHARD III

THE BATTLE OF BOSWORTH

DAWN OF THE TUDORS

During the Wars of the Roses, many vied to wear the crown of England, but an unlikely claimant silenced the battle drums to become king

Written by Ian Rimmer

The small fleet set sail from France on 1 August 1485. Seven days later, the babble of mostly French voices and Scottish accents were heard on Welsh soil as the force made land at Milford Haven. They were soldiers of fortune, 2,000 strong at most, employed to fulfil a simple mission – seize the crown of England for their figurehead. This 'man who would be king' was Henry Tudor. His father, Edmund Tudor, had died before he was born. However, his mother, Margaret Beaufort, was very much alive. Both a widow and a mother before her 14th birthday, she later came to see that if events and circumstances turned sufficiently in her only son's favour, England's throne could be his. On 7 August, on the Pembrokeshire coast, he was closer than he'd ever been.

The royal blood in his veins was thin – his mother was a descendant of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and his mistress, Katherine Swynford, the pair later marrying to legitimise the line – but it was there. The Milford Haven landing site was near to where Henry was born, at Pembroke Castle, in 1457. King Henry VI had been the reigning monarch then. Edmund, Henry Tudor's father, and his uncle, Jasper, shared the same mother as the king, who looked favourably upon the offspring of her second marriage. Treating his half-brothers well was one of Henry VI's few virtues. Hindered by bouts of mental illness, his reign was ill starred. During it, he weakly allowed courtiers, especially the Beaufort family, and his wife, Margaret of Anjou, to grab power and wealth. The king's administration was increasingly incompetent and corrupt.

At the age of four, Henry Tudor was in the care of his uncle Jasper at Pembroke Castle in Wales. Jasper was a loyal Lancastrian, fighting in vain to keep the castle out of Yorkist hands. It fell to William Herbert, and young Henry found himself in Herbert's household in 1469. That year, however, the Wars resumed following a fall out between Edward IV and Warwick. The latter switched sides to orchestrate a coup against the king, who fled to the continent. Henry VI, a prisoner in the Tower of London for five years, was released and restored to the throne. In this brief Lancastrian revival, Herbert was executed after the Battle of Edgecote Moor, and Henry Tudor went back to his uncle.

Events turned swiftly again when Edward returned to England. Gathering followers, he faced Warwick at the Battle of Barnet, and triumphed. Warwick, 'the kingmaker', was killed. The same fate befell Henry VI's heir, the 17-year-old Edward Prince of Wales, at the next battle, at Tewkesbury.

Shortly after, the recaptured Henry VI died, possibly of ill health, but most likely murder. The Yorkist grip on the crown was now vice like. Any Lancastrian noble or supporter was at risk. Jasper Tudor, one of the most prominent still alive, fled to Brittany in 1471, taking Henry with him.

Partly under protection, partly under house arrest, they lived in exile at the behest of Duke Francis II, who viewed the pair as useful pawns in his dispute with King Louis XI of France, and France's dispute with England. In 1476, Edward IV seemed to have persuaded Francis to hand the pair back for a payment, but a letter from Margaret Beaufort alerted Jasper and Henry of the plan. Henry feigned illness before they escaped to sanctuary.

Henry's mother had married twice more by then. Despite her Lancastrian roots, her marriage to Henry Stafford was harmonious, even though he fought for the Yorkists and died from wounds helping Edward IV triumph at Barnet. Her next marriage, in 1472, seems a calculated alliance. Her new husband was Thomas Lord Stanley, a wealthy landowner from the northwest of England, and prominent in Edward IV's court. Given access to it by her marriage, Margaret soon impressed the queen, Elizabeth Woodville, becoming godmother to one of her daughters. No doubt aided by her husband's influence with the king, she sought to end her son's exile and secure his future. If Henry could return to England and regain his title - Earl of Richmond - he might become a husband to Edward's eldest daughter, Princess Elizabeth of York, potentially neutralising some of the bad blood between the two Houses.

Before any of that happened, though, Edward IV unexpectedly died. A commanding figure, tall, good looking and fond of high living, the excesses of his life simply took their toll. Edward's heir, the 12-year-old Prince of Wales, was set for the throne as Edward V. A Regency Council dominated by his uncles would be needed to aid him, but those uncles were at loggerheads. The late king's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, moved to seize the initiative. The prince was travelling to London with his mother's brother Anthony, Earl Rivers, when Gloucester, supported by the Duke of Buckingham, intercepted them at Stony Stratford. Rivers was arrested for plotting against Gloucester, and would shortly be executed. Gloucester and Buckingham rode into London with the prince. Gloucester was declared protector of the realm.

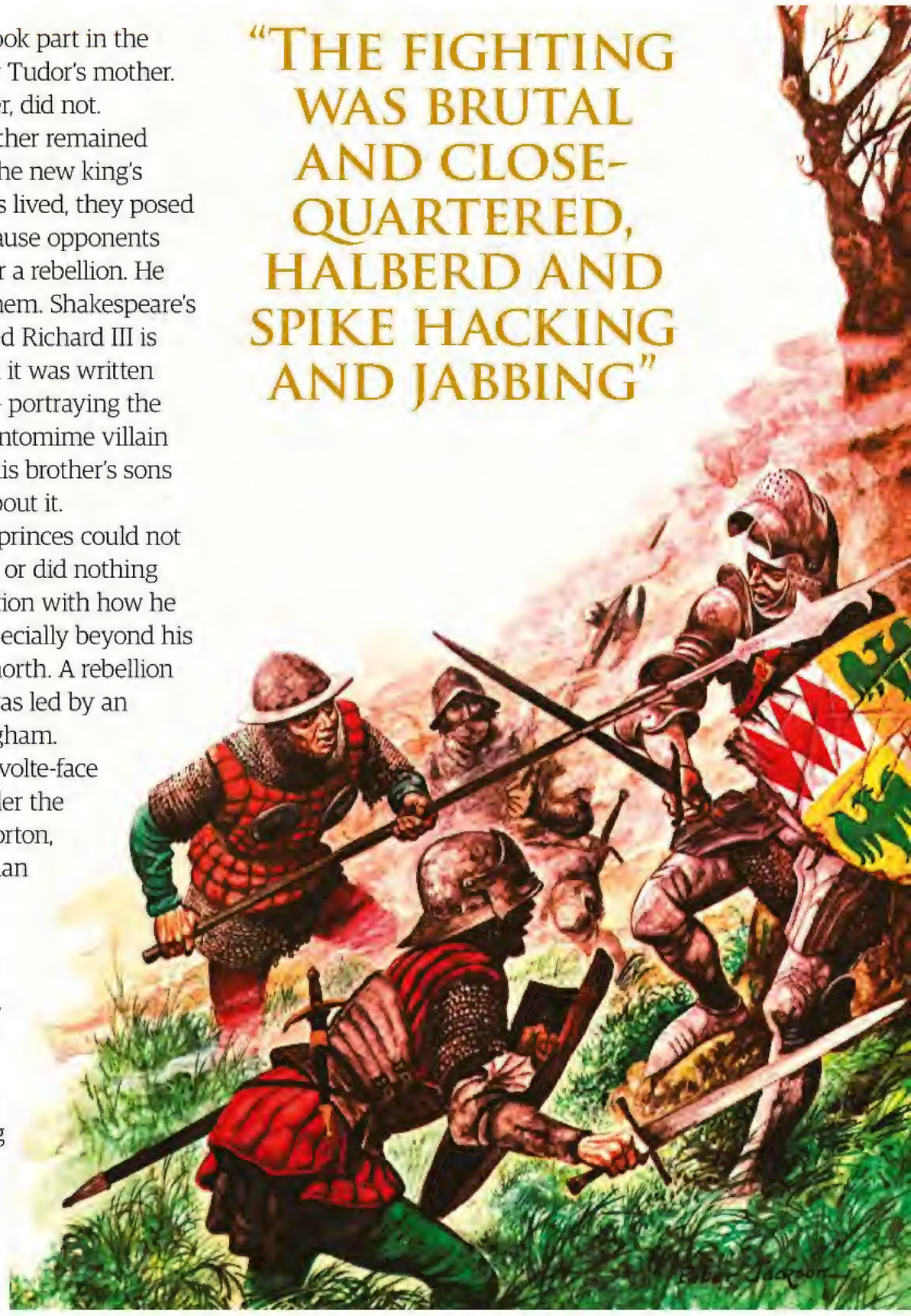
Next, at a meeting supposedly to plan Edward V's coronation, Gloucester accused his dead brother's trusted confident, Lord Hastings, of plotting against him. While Hastings was beheaded without trial, others were arrested and imprisoned, including Thomas Lord Stanley. With Hastings silenced, Gloucester's supporters then asserted that the promiscuous Edward IV had promised to marry another woman before his wedding to Elizabeth Woodville, invalidating the marriage and rendering any offspring from it illegitimate. Parliament agreed and declared the late king's marriage invalid, leaving Gloucester as the Yorkist heir. He was crowned King Richard III on 6 July 1483. Stanley, released days earlier, was reinstated and took part in the coronation, as did his wife, Henry Tudor's mother. The new king's nephews, however, did not.

Edward V and his younger brother remained in the Tower, supposedly under the new king's protection. But while his nephews lived, they posed a threat to Richard's position because opponents could use them as figureheads for a rebellion. He had a clear motive to eliminate them. Shakespeare's version of a child-killing, deformed Richard III is often accepted as fact, yet though it was written to please a later royal household - portraying the pitiless monarch as virtually a pantomime villain - the central charge that he had his brother's sons murdered has the ring of truth about it.

Rumours of the demise of the princes could not be contained and Richard III said or did nothing publicly to stop them. Dissatisfaction with how he had come to the throne grew, especially beyond his power base of supporters in the north. A rebellion seemed likely. When it came, it was led by an unlikely foe - former ally Buckingham.

The reasons for Buckingham's volte-face are unclear, but he had come under the influence of the persuasive Dr Morton, bishop of Ely. This shrewd politician had served both Edward IV and the previous Lancastrian regime equally well. His counsel appears to have encouraged Buckingham, while Morton had also contacted Margaret Beaufort. She in turn liaised in secret with Edward IV's widow to gain support for putting her son on the throne provided he married the former king's daughter, Princess Elizabeth. Further, Lady Margaret contacted her son in Brittany,

"THE FIGHTING WAS BRUTAL AND CLOSE-QUARTERED, HALBERD AND SPIKE HACKING AND JABBING"



Pembroke Castle, birthplace of Henry Tudor and where he was brought up in the care of his uncle Jasper

Who was the better king?

They shared a battlefield at Bosworth and the crown of England, and despite long and short reigns, they can be compared

HENRY VII VS RICHARD III

BATTLEFIELD PERFORMANCE

A hardened combat veteran of the Wars of the Roses and in tackling Scottish unrest, Richard's bold but doomed charge at the inexperienced Henry at Bosworth almost carried the day.

FOREIGN POLICY

While Richard tried and failed to negotiate Henry's return from foreign exile, when king, Henry forged strong treaty alliances abroad that avoided costly wars and helped the economy.

WELFARE & REFORMS

Richard was an able administrator with reformist intensions, though he later had to backtrack for financial reasons. Henry was quite conservative, maintaining much of the previous regime's administration methods.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Neither was much loved. Henry, while respected, was equally feared. Disquiet about the fate of the princes and stealing the throne meant Richard was loathed beyond his northern powerbase.

DYNASTIC RECORD

Attempting to maintain the Plantagenet line, Richard became its last ruler. In contrast, perhaps owing more to luck than judgement, Henry established the next dynasty.

urging him to raise an invasion force. Henry Tudor did so, sailing in early November 1483, but by then Richard III had crushed the poorly co-ordinated rebellion and Buckingham had been beheaded.

Thomas Lord Stanley convinced the king he had no knowledge of his wife's part in the rebellion. Her life was spared, though she was formally placed in her husband's custody, with her titles and possessions passing into his control. It was an error by Richard III, for by the time of Henry Tudor's second invasion in 1485, the Stanley family had been communicating with him for some time.

From the Pembrokeshire coast, Tudor's force marched through Wales into England. It gained support along the way, from Welsh troops gathered by his uncle Jasper to important disaffected noble families that were perhaps less for him and more anti the usurper king. However, Richard III had strong backing too, from the armies of the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Northumberland and, he'd have thought, Thomas Lord Stanley. Yet if Thomas and his younger brother, Sir William, were going to stay loyal, the king might have expected their armies to intercept Tudor's march. Instead, they played a waiting game. Summoned by the king to his Nottingham base, Thomas Lord Stanley pleaded illness and remained absent, even though his son, Lord Strange, was with the king's court and effectively a hostage against his father's defection.

The two armies converged in the East Midlands, while the troops of the Stanleys' shadowed both but stayed uncommitted. On the morning of 22 August 1485, the inevitable battle began. A definitive narrative of what happened cannot be agreed as contemporary accounts are sparse. Even the battlefield location, long believed to have been at Ambion Hill near Market Bosworth, is now thought to be a mile away at Fenn Lane Farm. Yet it is likely that Tudor's force, by then some 5,000 strong, had the seasoned field commander the Earl of Oxford in the vanguard, with support on the flanks, and Henry Tudor himself leading a small mounted force to the rear. Facing them were the Duke of Norfolk's men front and centre, with artillery on both flanks, and the king's horsemen in behind. Northumberland's army sat deeper, covering either flank. Richard III had more than twice the men at Tudor's disposal, yet to one side, still uncommitted, were 6,000 Stanley men.

After cannon fire and a rain of arrows, both vanguards slammed into each other. The fighting was brutal and close-quartered, halberd and spike hacking and jabbing against metal-plate armour. The king's superiority of numbers counted for little as Northumberland's men stayed back, never landing a blow. Oxford's men held up well, and Norfolk was killed, but Tudor, seeking support, rode towards the Stanley army. Richard III saw both the movement of Tudor's standard and opportunity. It was risky and bold, but if his mounted knights swooped to engage Tudor's smaller group, his rival could be eliminated and the day won. The king charged.

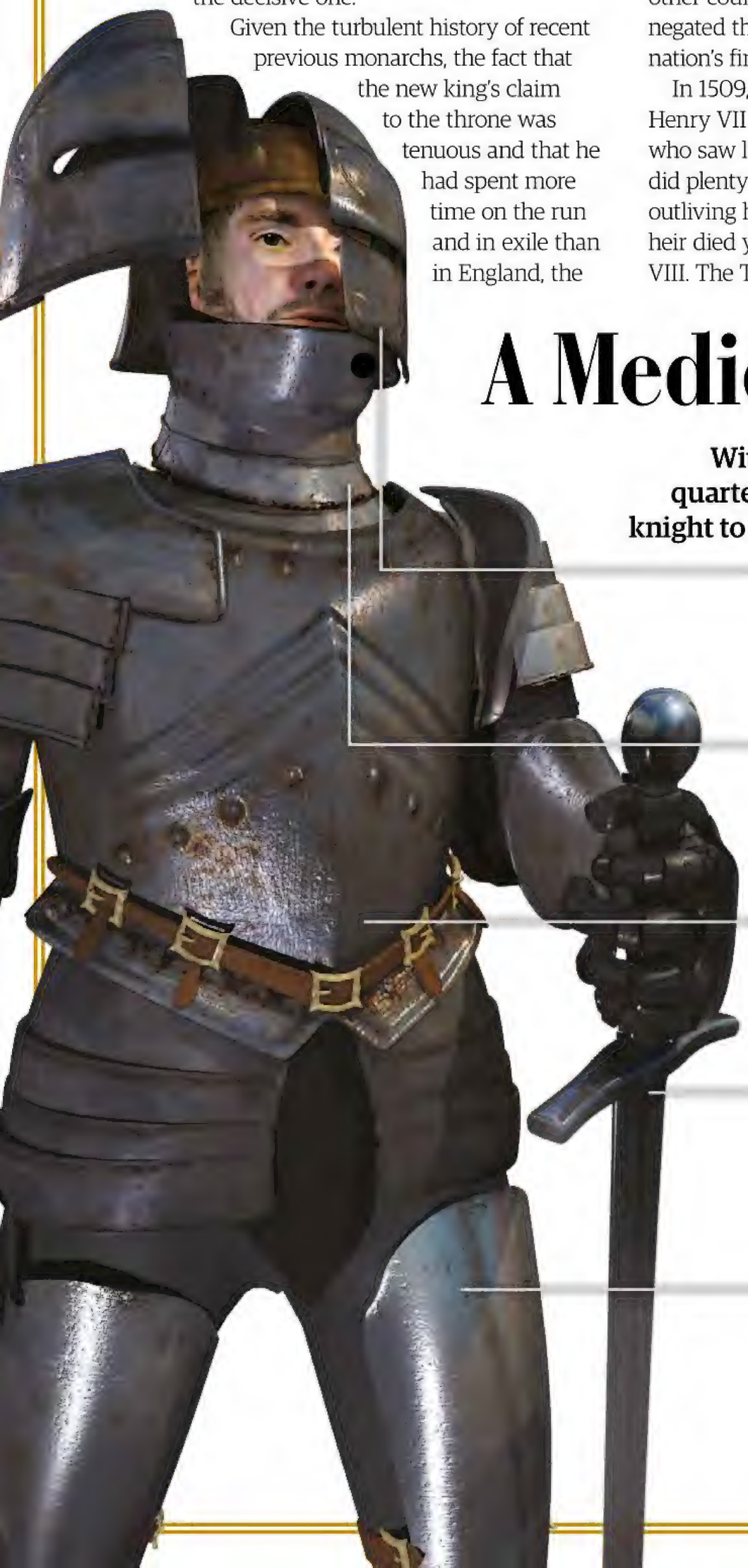
The impetus carried the king's men deep into Tudor's retinue. The fighting was desperate, the king

hacking and slashing to get to his nemesis. Tudor saw his standard-bearer was cut down. Richard III was getting close – close enough for Tudor to see the circlet crown around his helmet – when suddenly the king's flank came under attack. Sir William Stanley, at last acting, betrayed the king by throwing his lot in with Tudor. It turned the tide. The king, some say yelling "treason, treason!", was separated from his men and unseated. He fought on bravely but was enveloped by Welsh foot soldiers. As he was hacked down and killed, legend has it that the circlet flew from his helmet and was retrieved by Thomas Lord Stanley, who placed it on his stepson's head to proclaim him King Henry VII. Their leader dead, many Yorkist soldiers surrendered, bringing the battle to an end after barely two hours. It wasn't quite the last in the Wars of the Roses, but it proved the decisive one.

Given the turbulent history of recent previous monarchs, the fact that the new king's claim to the throne was tenuous and that he had spent more time on the run and in exile than in England, the prospects for Henry VII actually lasting long on the throne were not good. Nevertheless, he set about the task. His swift marriage to Princess Elizabeth, uniting the Houses of Lancaster and York through the Tudor name, helped appease Yorkist hostility. An heir, Arthur, was born less than a year after his official coronation, cementing the new king's reign.

Additionally, while Henry VII was ruthless with the leading players who had supported Richard, he left most of the middle-ranking Yorkists alone. This meant the administration of the country continued smoothly. The new king also benefited from the fact that the country was heartily sick of civil strife. When several pretenders to his position emerged, he was able to snuff out rebellions adroitly because the impostors were unable to gather sufficient support. Importantly, Henry VII built strong alliances with other countries, particularly France and Spain. This negated the need for war-funding taxes, allowing the nation's finances to recover.

In 1509, after almost 24 years on the throne, Henry VII died in his bed. Lady Margaret Beaufort, who saw little of her son when he was young but did plenty to see him to the throne, lay him to rest, outliving him by two months. Although Arthur the heir died young, the 'spare' took the crown as Henry VIII. The Tudor dynasty had begun.



A Medieval knight

With battles decided by fierce close-quarters fighting, it was important for a knight to have protection from head to toe

Helmet
Enclosing the wearer's entire head for maximum protection, Medieval helmets often had hinged visors to allow a clear field of vision when necessary.

Gorget
This steel collar protected the front and back of the neck and covered the neck opening in a complete cuirass. It also covered part of the clavicles and sternum.

Heavy armour
The whole suit could have 250 pieces and weigh up to 50 kilograms. The knight could be so heavy that he could barely move, and if he fell from his horse, he would become defenceless.

Sword
With a straight double-edged steel blade, a knight's sword could be between 2.5 and 2.8 feet long and weigh between 1.3 and 1.5 kilograms.

Cuisses
These metal plates protected the thighs, and greaves covered the lower parts of the leg and calves.

After the Battle of Tewkesbury, Edward IV closes on the captured Margaret of Anjou

Richard's wounds

Researchers identified at least 11 injuries on the recently discovered king's skeleton.Some may have been inflicted after death to abuse the body

1. The fatal blows

At the base of the skull, a section of bone has been sliced off by a large, sharp-bladed weapon, like a halberd. There is a second deep penetration hole, perhaps sword created. Either injury would have been fatal.

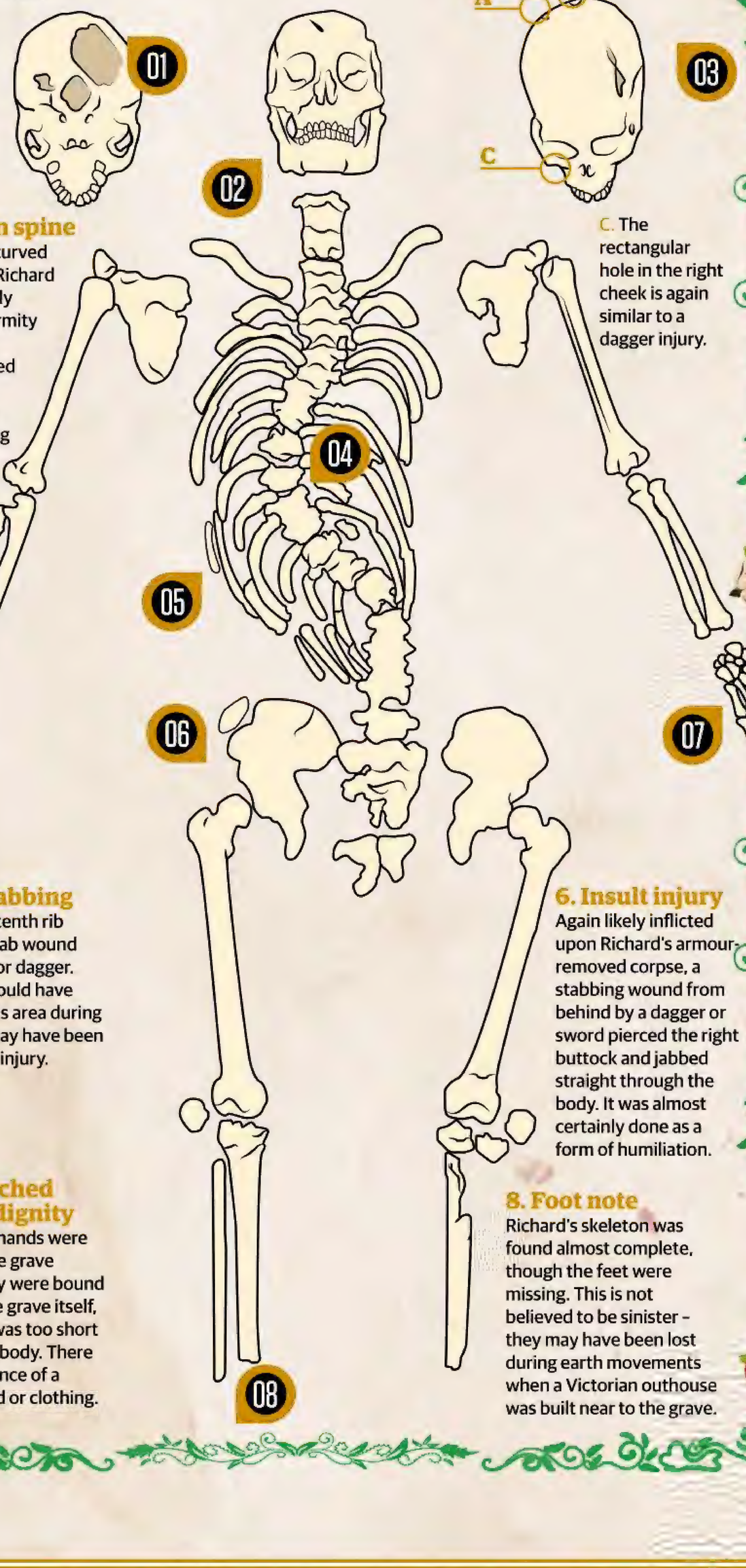
2. Frontal attack

There is a cut mark on the lower jaw, likely a knife injury. This, together with both fatal blows, suggests that Richard had lost his helmet in the battle.

3. Head injuries

A. The top rear of the skull has been clipped several times by a sharp-bladed weapon, such as a sword. Painful blows, though not fatal.

B. A small penetration wound on the skull top, consistent with that of a dagger, was forceful enough to split the bone, pushing small pieces inside.



4. Misshapen spine

The pronounced curved backbone shows Richard had scoliosis. Likely genetic, this deformity wasn't present at birth but developed in adolescence. It would have led to one shoulder being slightly higher than the other, rather than the hunchback of Shakespeare's creation.

C. The rectangular hole in the right cheek is again similar to a dagger injury.

5. Side stabbing

A cut on the tenth rib indicates a stab wound from a knife or dagger. As armour would have protected this area during battle, this may have been a post-death injury.

6. Insult injury

Again likely inflicted upon Richard's armour-removed corpse, a stabbing wound from behind by a dagger or sword pierced the right buttock and jabbed straight through the body. It was almost certainly done as a form of humiliation.

7. Despatched without dignity

The way the hands were crossed in the grave suggests they were bound together. The grave itself, hastily dug, was too short for Richard's body. There was no evidence of a coffin, shroud or clothing.

8. Foot note

Richard's skeleton was found almost complete, though the feet were missing. This is not believed to be sinister – they may have been lost during earth movements when a Victorian outhouse was built near to the grave.

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TUDOR RULE

124 Key players 1485-1487
Meet the men and women that shaped the Wars of the Roses during the Tudor reign

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Amid treachery, treason and scheming plots, the Tudors fought tooth and nail to keep their crown from its Yorkist enemies

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How Shakespeare manipulated and twisted history to paint themselves the Tudors as heroes and the Plantagenets the villains

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KEY FIGURES 1485-87

With the Lancastrians long gone and the Yorkists brutally defeated, Henry Tudor ascended the throne as Henry VII – but who were the people to put him on his throne?

Henry VII

ALLIANCE TUDOR
LIFESPAN 52
POLITICAL PROWESS 9/10
MILITARY MIGHT 7/10

Alliance

Henry VII was the leader of the Tudor faction that was determined to remove Richard III from the throne.

Lifespan

Born in 1457, the king died in 1509 of tuberculosis.

Political prowess

A shrewd politician, Henry managed to secure the English throne and united the majority of his kingdom after decades of war.

Military might

Although Henry won his crown through battle, he actively avoided war as a king and instead sought peace at home and abroad.

Overview

Encouraged by his mother, Margaret Beaufort, Henry was the last hope for the Lancastrian cause. He promised to marry Elizabeth of York and supported by her maternal family, the Woodvilles. Henry invaded England and defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. Although he had Lancastrian blood through his mother, Henry was born a Tudor and so his reign marked the beginning of the Tudor dynasty.

Elizabeth of York

ALLIANCE YORK & TUDOR
LIFESPAN 37
POLITICAL PROWESS 3/10
MILITARY MIGHT 2/10

Alliance

Born into the House of York, Elizabeth of York became a loyal member of the House of Tudor as Henry VII's wife.

Lifespan

Elizabeth was born in 1466 and died while giving birth to a daughter in 1503.

Political prowess

Elizabeth did not hold much political influence because of her domineering mother-in-law but she nonetheless survived the war to become queen.

Military might

Elizabeth was not involved with military matters but her family did support Henry's invasion of England.

Overview

Elizabeth lived through the reigns of her father, her brother and her uncle before marrying Henry VII. With her brothers dead, Elizabeth had a strong claim to the throne through her father, the Yorkist king Edward IV. Not only did her marriage to Henry VII unite the warring Houses of York and Lancaster, but it also bolstered her husband's claim to the throne, which was weak in comparison to hers.

Margaret Beaufort

ALLIANCE LANCASTER & TUDOR
LIFESPAN 66
POLITICAL PROWESS 10/10
MILITARY MIGHT 7/10

Alliance

Margaret was a member and loyal supporter of the Lancastrians, with her son, the future Henry VII assuming the Lancastrian cause.

Lifespan

Born in 1443, she died of natural causes in 1509.

Political prowess

Margaret constantly plotted for the downfall of the Yorkists and she was politically powerful during her son's reign.

Military might

Although not present for her son's victory, it was Margaret who helped organise and provide allies for Henry's cause.

Overview

A master manipulator, Margaret always fought for the Lancastrian cause and never gave up hope that her son, Henry, would be king. Through her fourth husband, Thomas Stanley, Margaret managed to remain at the courts of Edward IV and Richard III, all the while plotting to restore the House of Lancaster to its rightful place on the English throne. Her husband provided military support for Henry during the Battle of Bosworth and she became extremely influential during her son's reign.

Lambert Simnel

ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN C.57
POLITICAL PROWESS 1/10
MILITARY MIGHT 2/10

Alliance
Simnel, claiming to be Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick, supported the Yorkists.

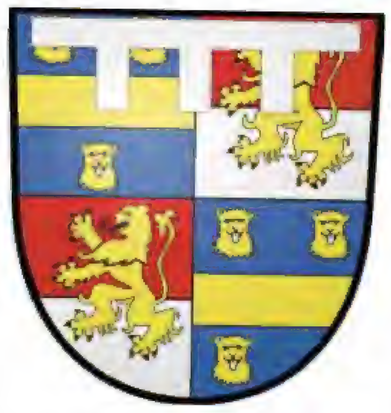
Lifespan
Born circa 1477, Simnel died around 1534 for unknown reasons.

Political prowess
Although he was the face of Yorkist rebellion, he was just a boy and the real power lay with John de la Pole.

Military might
His rebellion succeeded in gaining some support but it was crushed by the king's army.

Overview
Simnel was paraded as Edward Plantagenet, the son of George, Duke of Clarence, and a Yorkist claimant to the throne. Edward was imprisoned in the Tower of London but because of their physical similarity, the Yorkists used Simnel as the figurehead for their rebellion. Merely a boy, he was ultimately pardoned by King Henry VII after the uprising was quashed and he actually went on to work in the royal kitchen.

John de la Pole



ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 25
POLITICAL PROWESS 6/10
MILITARY MIGHT 5/10

Alliance
A nephew and supporter of Richard III, de la Pole was a loyal Yorkist who led a failed rebellion against Henry VII.

Lifespan
Born in 1462, he died in battle in 1487.

Political prowess
He organised the rebellion and managed to gain some support from others.

Military might
De la Pole was able to muster up an army for his uprising but it was defeated by the king's army.

Overview
After the death of Richard III's son and heir, de la Pole was seen as a potential successor for his uncle. When Richard was killed, he remained at Henry VII's court but after discovering Lambert Simnel, he plotted his rebellion. Gaining financial support from his aunt, Margaret of York, and military support in Ireland, de la Pole led his uprising into England but was killed in a battle against the king's forces.

Richard III

ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 32
POLITICAL PROWESS 8/10
MILITARY MIGHT 7/10

Alliance
As a member of the House of York, Richard III was the last Yorkist king of England.

Lifespan
Richard was born in 1452 and died in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth.

Political prowess
Whether Richard was a usurper or the rightful king is still up for debate but he nonetheless succeeded in taking the English throne.

Military might
Richard weathered Buckingham's rebellion in 1483, but he was ultimately slain at the Battle of Bosworth.

Overview
Richard III is one of the most controversial kings in English history thanks to the mystery of the Princes in the Tower. Having said that, he was loyal to his brother, Edward IV, and proved popular in the north of England. He became king after Edward's children were deemed illegitimate but he only remained on the throne for two years before he was killed at the Battle of Bosworth, causing Henry Tudor to seize the crown as Henry VII.

Margaret of York

ALLIANCE YORK
LIFESPAN 57
POLITICAL PROWESS 9/10
MILITARY MIGHT 6/10

Alliance
As the sister of Edward IV and Richard III, Margaret was a member of the House of York and a loyal supporter.

Lifespan
Born in 1446, Margaret died in 1503 of unknown causes regarding ill health.

Political prowess
After the House of York ceased to rule England, Margaret did everything she could to oppose the Tudors.

Military might
Margaret gave financial support to the rebellions of both Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck.

Overview
Having grown up through the turbulent Wars of the Roses, Margaret continued to support her brothers even after her marriage to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. With the death of Richard III, she supported Lambert Simnel's rebellion and publicly acknowledged Perkin Warbeck as her nephew. Whether Margaret really believed that Warbeck was her kin is still debated today but Henry VII could do little to her as she was the step-mother-in-law of Holy Roman Emperor Maximillian I.

Henry Percy

ALLIANCE YORK & TUDOR
LIFESPAN 40
POLITICAL PROWESS 8/10
MILITARY MIGHT 9/10

Alliance
A supporter of the House of York during the reigns of Edward and Richard, Percy later supported Henry VII.

Lifespan
Percy was born in 1449 and was murdered in 1489.

Political prowess
He managed to remain in favour during the reigns of Edward, Richard and Henry.

Military might
In command of the Yorkist reserves, Percy did not commit his troops to the Battle of Bosworth, which ultimately contributed to Richard's defeat.

Overview
Born the son of a Lancastrian supporter who died fighting the Yorkists, Percy managed to petition Edward IV for the restoration of his title and lands. He held many important posts while both Edward and Richard were on the English throne but he remained inactive during the Battle of Bosworth. Initially arrested by Henry VII, Percy later regained his title of earl of Northumberland as well as his position at court. He was later lynched during a revolt against Henry VII's taxes.

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Battles & Bloodshed 1485-1487

After Richard III's defeat at Bosworth, Henry VII took the throne and quelled unrest across his new kingdom

Written by William E Welsh

Battle of Bosworth

22 August 1485

Tudor

Hoping to seize the throne from King Richard III, Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, led his Lancastrian army into battle against Richard's Yorkist army in Leicestershire. Lord Thomas Stanley and Sir William Stanley initially refused to commit their forces to either side. The two armies clashed while the Stanleys looked on. Richard, hoping for single combat with Henry, tried to reach his opponent but was unhorsed and slain. The Stanleys' troops then made their choice and aided Henry in routing the Yorkists.

Battle of Stoke

16 June 1487

Tudor

Aggrieved Yorkists used English commoner Lambert Simnel to impersonate Edward, 17th Earl of Warwick, even though the ruse was implausible given that Edward was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Following preparations in Ireland, the pretender's mercenary army of Irish, Germans and Swiss landed in Lancashire. King Henry VII's army intercepted the rebel army in Nottinghamshire. Although the royal vanguard was mauled by the Yorkists, the main royal army arrived just in time to completely crush the young pretender's forces.

"Although the royal vanguard was mauled by the Yorkists, the main royal army arrived just in time"

SCOTLAND
Lancastrian victory
Yorkist victory
Tudor victory
Hedgeley Moor
Hexham
Towton
YORK
Ferrybridge
Wakefield
Blore Heath
WALES
Stoke
Losecote Field
Bosworth
Ludford Bridge
Mortimer's Cross
Edgecote Moor
Northampton
St Albans
Tewkesbury
Barnet
LONDON
ENGLAND

PURGE OF THE PLANTAGENETS

Amid treachery, treason and scheming plots, the Tudors fought tooth and nail to keep their crown

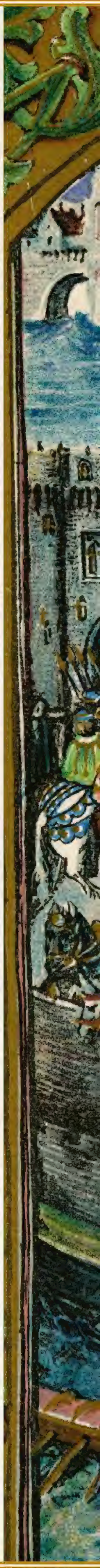
Written by Jon Wright

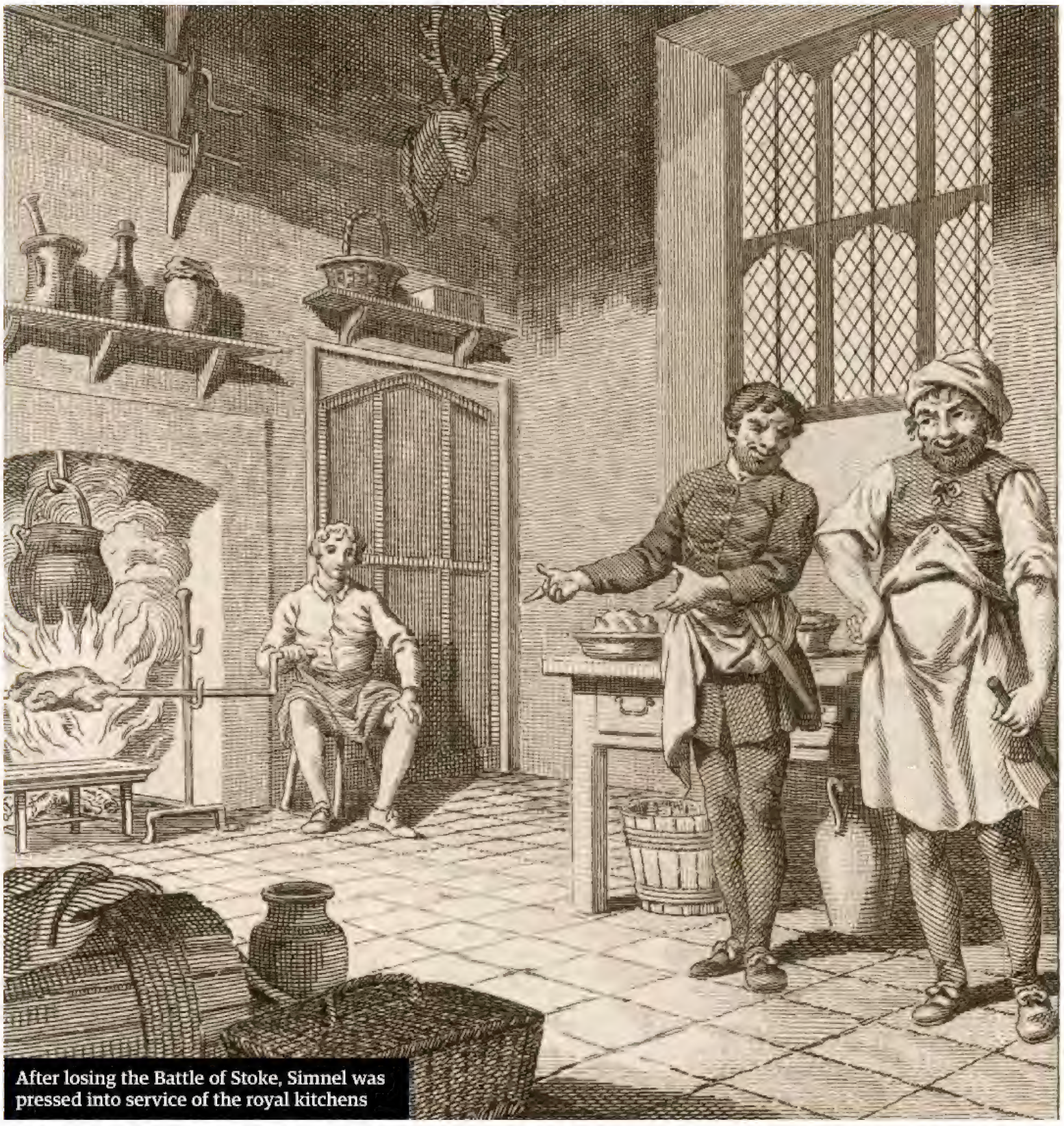
For the Tudor chronicler Edward Hall, Henry VII's accession to the English throne in 1485 had been an unalloyed blessing. "The day was now come," Hall wrote, "that the seed of tumultuous factions and the fountain of civil dissension should be stopped, evacuated and clearly extinguished." Lancastrian victory at Bosworth was swiftly followed by Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV, and two clashing houses 'equivalent in riches, fame and honour were brought into one knot and connected together.' However, if, for many, 'peace was thought to descend out of heaven into England' the first Tudor monarch would also have to confront, 'the crafty wiles and lurking traps of his secret enemies.' Small wonder, then, that from the outset Henry, 'devised, studied and compassed to extirpate and eradicate all interior seditions'.

We are so familiar with the achievements of the Tudor period that it can be hard to grasp just how fragile the dynasty was during its first decades. Many sought to revive Yorkist fortunes and Hall, looking back from the relative peace of the 1540s, was eager to denounce the culprits. Few figures irked Hall more than Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy and sister to Edward IV, who, on Hall's account, had been "inflamed with malice and diabolical instinction had invented and practised all mischiefs, displeasures and damages that she could devise against the king of England, and wrought all the ways possible how to suck his blood and compass his destruction". As we shall see, Margaret was not alone in her desire to undermine, and preferably snuff out, the Tudor dynasty. But how was this goal to be achieved?

It is often suggested that Henry VII's claim to the English throne was tenuous. This is rather harsh. Through his mother, Margaret Beaufort, Henry was directly descended from John of Gaunt, the son of Edward III: a slightly remote but still meaningful royal pedigree. Others had equal or more enticing claims, however, and they served as convenient foci for the rebellious machinations that plagued Henry's reign.

Edward Plantagenet, the Earl of Warwick, was the son of the Duke of Clarence and, as such, the nephew of both Edward IV and Richard III. He naturally headed many Yorkist lists of alternatives to Henry VII. Early in





After losing the Battle of Stoke, Simnel was pressed into service of the royal kitchens

his reign, Henry moved the ten-year-old Warwick from Sheriff Hutton in Yorkshire to the Tower of London. Though Warwick was always safely under lock and key, rumours of his escape were apt to surface, while others suggested that Warwick's father had swapped him in the cradle with another infant: perhaps the true Warwick was still at large. Groundless as all this was, speculation allowed one Lambert Simnel to be passed off, with a modicum of feasibility, as the young Warwick. The origins of the deception are complex. The disgruntled priest Richard Simonds is often positioned as a leading figure, but the enterprise was simply too well managed to be the brainchild of a single maverick cleric. In any event, the ruse went down particularly well in Ireland, always a hotbed of Yorkist sympathy, and figures as lofty as Thomas Fitzgerald, Ireland's chancellor, and Gerald Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, rallied to Simnel's cause.

Back in London, strenuous efforts were made to expose Simnel as a counterfeit. In February 1487, the real Warwick was led from the Tower and paraded 'throughout all the principal streets... to be seen by the people'. He was, 'conducted to St Paul's Church in solemn procession...And it was provided also in good fashion that divers of the nobility and others of quality (especially of those that the king most suspected, and knew the person of Plantagenet best) had communication with the young gentleman by the way'. The ploy worked well, 'with the subjects here, at least with so many as out of error, and not out of malice, might be misled'. Not so in Ireland, where the charade went from strength to strength. By May 1487, Simnel was crowned in Dublin as Edward VI.

"Simnel, a pawn who deserved little blame, was pressed into service in the royal kitchens"

Margaret of Burgundy had heartily welcomed Simnel during his brief visit to the Low Countries in early 1487 and, before too long, troops (mostly German mercenaries) were on their way to Ireland. By this stage, two disenchanted English nobles had taken up leading roles in the Simnel affair: Viscount Lovell, fresh from provoking an earlier rebellion against Henry, and the Earl of Lincoln, a man once touted as the rightful successor to Richard III. An army crossed the Irish Sea in June, landing at Furness, Lancashire, they traversed the Pennines into Yorkshire and then headed south. Henry VII was well prepared and, at the Battle of Stoke on June 16, secured a convincing victory. Lincoln perished on the battlefield, Lovell most likely fled to Scotland and the boy Simnel, a pawn who deserved little blame for what had happened, is said to have been pressed into service in the royal kitchens. Clemency had, in fact, played a significant role throughout the whole Simnel shambles, with Henry routinely offering pardons in order to divide his opponents. As new, more urgent challenges arose, however, Henry's indulgence would show its limits.

If Warwick was an excellent vehicle for Yorkist designs, then a son of Edward IV would have been even more potent. The famous Princes in the Tower had, in all likelihood, been done away with before Henry came to the throne but, again, facts were unable to stymie fantasies. In December 1491, Perkin Warbeck, a native of Tournai, fetched up at Cork during a business trip with his employer, a Breton silk merchant. The precise details of how a plot was concocted are hazy but Yorkist loyalists, with John Taylor in the vanguard, convinced Warbeck to pose as Edward's son, Richard. An alarming number of Henry's overseas rivals rushed to recognise Warbeck as a putative Richard IV. It was impossible to be sure of what had happened to Edward IV's sons, but authenticity appears to have mattered far less than the opportunity to disrupt Henry VII's rule. By March 1492, Charles VIII was welcoming Warbeck to France. When he crossed into the Low Countries, Margaret of Burgundy acknowledged him as Richard, her beloved nephew. Warbeck even made it as far as Vienna, where he was feted by the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I.

The Warbeck cause also gained traction at the heart of the English political establishment, even denting the former loyalty of the chamberlain of the King's household, Sir William Stanley, who was beheaded on Tower Hill in February 1495. The threat was far more perilous than had been the case with the Simnel saga, and history may have turned out very differently if an invading army had landed successfully in Kent in July 1495. As it was, chaos descended on the beaches and Warbeck escaped. After stopping off at the siege of Waterford in Ireland, Warbeck travelled on to Scotland where James IV showered him with favours. An estimable marriage was arranged between Warbeck and Lady Katherine Gordon, with Warbeck and the king jousting together during the marital celebrations, and by September

The wedding of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York unified the warring houses

1496, the two men were leading an army over the border into England. This too came to nothing but Warbeck could not be faulted for his resilience. He travelled, via Ireland, to the West Country where the locals had been rebelling against Henry VII's financial policies since May 1497. After being routed at Blackheath on their march to London, many of them were drawn to Warbeck's banner and, while a siege of Exeter proved unsuccessful, this had been a truly hazardous few years for the fledgling Tudor regime. Warbeck realised that his stock of stratagems was now exhausted, however, and after taking temporary sanctuary at Beaulieu Abbey in Hampshire, he surrendered on the guarantee that he would not be killed.

Henry VII was unable to keep that promise. Warbeck was eventually consigned to the Tower of London: the home, as we've seen, of the Earl of Warwick. The danger posed by Clarence's son had not vanished. On Shrove Tuesday 1499, Ralph Wilford was hanged on Old Kent Road. This son of a cordwainer in Bishopsgate Street had, like Simnel before him, posed as Warwick. The Earl was clearly still a magnet for Yorkist discontent and, in addition, it was assumed that he was instinctively sympathetic to Warbeck's cause. A plot to free both Warwick and Warbeck was launched and Henry VII's patience came to an end. Perkin was hanged at Tyburn on 23 November 1499 while Warwick was executed at Tower Hill five days later.

The diabolical duchess

One woman was a driving force behind the Yorkist attempts to oust Henry from the throne

The image of Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy (1446-1503) as an inveterate plotter against Henry VII would be sustained throughout the Tudor era and beyond. Early in the 17th century, Thomas Gainsford more than matched the venomous tone of Edward Hall. Margaret, Gainsford wrote, had been bitterly disappointed by the failure of the Lambert Simnel imposture, but then "studied night and day upon further and further instigations; yet, hovered over opportunity like a hawk for her pray, to torment and trouble the peace of England: embracing every strange and prestigious illusion, and not caring with what pullies of ridiculous and impossible actions her malice and revenges were wound up." She was, in Gainsford's view, determined to bring down Henry VII, "whom she cursed on her knees, and hated, even beyond the tenderness of her sex."

For all the hyperbole of such accounts, Margaret profoundly disapproved of Henry's rule and seems to have played an important role in both the Simnel and Warbeck episodes. The troops who sailed to Ireland in support of Warbeck were paid for out of Margaret's coffers, and she may well have believed that Warbeck was her nephew Richard. She said as much in a letter to her confidante Isabella of Castile in August 1492.

There was more to Margaret, however, than the Yorkist matriarch whose court attracted so many English exiles with an animus against the Tudors. Married to Charles, Count of Charolais in 1468, Margaret proved to be a woman of profound religious devotion and keen intellectual instincts supporting the emerging printing revolution with gusto. Her last visit to England would be in 1480 and, while she refused to acknowledge Henry VII's accession five years later, a belated if grudging peace was made between the two in 1498. This was doubtless more the result of diplomatic necessity than a genuine volte face in favour of the Tudors. Margaret was Yorkist to the core.

A late 15th-century portrait of Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy by a Dutch artist

Warwick, possessed of huge symbolic power and a regular obstacle to Henry VII's broader diplomatic and dynastic goals, proved the point that, as Thomas Gainsford later put it, Henry's reign, "was a dangerous time for any Plantagenet to live in." Gainsford was quick to add, of course, that by killing Warwick, "there was nothing done but by orderly proceedings and justifiable causes." Henry, in pursuit of "the sedation of all troubles, both present and to come... had struck off his head and with him the head of all division and dissension." Given the persistence of the Yorkist cause over the coming decades, this would prove to be wildly optimistic.

As for the Perkin-Warbeck rebellion, Edward Hall reported that through the 1490s, "no man was quiet in his own mind, but his brains and senses daily laboured...about this great and weighty matter." The memory certainly weighed heavily on Henry VII and, for the rest of his reign, heading off further challenges to his legitimacy would become something of an obsession. Espionage networks, comparable to anything later masterminded by Elizabeth I, were erected; diplomatic treaties included clauses against harbouring traitors; and Henry paid small fortunes in 'loans', more accurately understood as bribes, to overseas rulers. For all this, no respite arrived for Henry following the deaths of Warbeck and Warwick. The regime's stability suffered badly with the death of Henry's son, Arthur, in 1502 and, by that date, another branch of the Plantagenets had begun to make mischief. This time around, suspicion fell on the descendants of Elizabeth, another sister of Edward IV and the wife of John de la Pole.

We have already seen one of this couple's sons, the Earl of Lincoln, entering the ranks for Lambert Simnel during the 1480s, but by the turn of the 16th century, his brother Edmund, Earl of Suffolk had taken centre stage. Edmund's relationship with Henry VII had always been strained but he had made significant shows of loyalty, helping to combat the West Country rebels in 1497. A temporary defection and unlicensed overseas trip, related to Edmund's involvement in a murder, had caused alarm but all appeared to be set fair upon his return. Then in August 1501, he once more crossed the Channel in the company of his brother Richard and his sense of a rightful claim to the English crown could no longer be subdued. Having secured the support of the Emperor Maximilian, Edmund was at Aachen by the end of the year, planning an invasion of England and, while this failed to materialise, his friends and allies at home would soon feel Henry VII's wrath. Attainders were issued, prison cells filled up and one of Edmund's closest associates, Sir James Tyrell, was executed. The crucial backing of the Emperor Maximilian evaporated, so at Easter 1504, Edmund left Aachen and was captured by the Duke of Gueldres on his way to Friesland. Edmund came into the custody of Philip of Burgundy and circumstances conspired to allow Henry VII to secure de la Pole as a prisoner. By this stage, in truth, Edmund's taste for rebellion had soured and by April 1506, he was in the Tower. Once more, Henry VII had provided guarantees that a rebel's life would be spared but, as we will shortly discover, this promise would not be kept by Henry's son and successor.

A painting of Henry VII by an unknown Dutch artist in 1505

"For the rest of his reign, heading off challenges to his legitimacy would become something of an obsession"

The image of Henry VII uniting the realm's warring factions is not without merit. The King, while 'infinitely suspicious' as Francis Bacon later put it, did not go out of his way to antagonise Yorkist sympathisers and former enemies. It was entirely possible to have fought against Henry at Bosworth and then, after demonstrating suitable fidelity, to pursue a glittering career at the early Tudor court. As for those who rose up against Henry, Bacon concluded that, "there was never so great rebellions expiated with so little blood" but this adjudication was overly charitable. It would certainly have surprised the dozens of men killed after the abortive Kentish landing in 1495 or in the wake of the West County rebellion. It would be fair to say, however, that Henry was not in the habit of executing on a whim and the death toll of leading participants in the major crises of the reign might well have been higher.

When Henry VIII came to the throne in 1509, the Yorkist threat was still all too tangible, which brings us back to the de la Pole brothers. Through the final years of Henry VII's reign, Richard de la Pole proved to be an enduring nuisance, hatching plans to invade England from Scotland, rallying support among the great and good of Italy and travelling as far as Buda to consult with Ladislaus VI. Treason was clearly on Richard's mind but all earlier misdemeanours were surpassed when, early in the next reign, he began to fight for French King Louis XII against the English. It was at this juncture that Henry VIII ordered the execution of Richard's brother Edmund in May 1513. Richard's response was to openly proclaim his supposed claim to the

The legend of the Princes in the Tower inspired this 19th-century painting by Paul Delaroche

After alliances with Kings and Emperors of Europe failed to put him on the throne, Warbeck was forced to take refuge in Beaulieu Abbey in Hampshire

English throne and he would spend the next decade thinking up treacherous dreams. None were realised and Richard died at the battle of Pavia in 1525.

The prospects of a meaningful Yorkist challenge to the Tudor rule were now increasingly remote, but there were still sufficient Plantagenet relations about the place, and more than enough grumblings against Henry VIII to keep him on high alert. The victims of this continuing climate of surveillance did not always deserve their unhappy fates. Margaret Pole was the sister of the Earl of Warwick and took her surname from her husband Sir Richard Pole, not to be confused with the ill-starred Richard de la Pole. Despite her family's turbulent past, Margaret, now a widow, returned to royal favour under King Henry VIII, regaining the lands of the Earldom of Salisbury in 1512. Her support for Catherine of Aragon and her daughter Mary did not sit well with the Henrician regime, however, and neither did the antics of her sons.

Reginald Pole, once a keen supporter of Henry's divorce from Katherine, spent much of the 1530s denouncing the newly minted royal supremacy over the English Church, bemoaning the break

with Rome and stirring up agitation among Henry's critics at home and abroad. His tract against the supremacy, *De Unitate*, caused uproar and Margaret's lacklustre scolding of her son (she only went so far as describing the work as "a folly") did not impress Henry and his ministers. Reginald was on the continent, carving out an impressive clerical career, but this did not deter Henry from approving various assassination attempts against him. In England, Henry Pole, Lord Montagu, was distressed by his brother Reginald's actions and had long demonstrated loyalty to the king. Regrettably, he was tarred through association and had also grown close to other Plantagenet notables – including Henry Courtenay, Marquess of Exeter – who were suspected of harbouring sinister intentions. Accusations from another Pole brother, Geoffrey, added to the combustible mix and in January 1539, Henry Pole and Courtenay were executed: their supposed crimes included wanting King Henry dead.

The times being what they were, Margaret Pole would also face Henry's ire, though it is far from clear what she was guilty of, as the indictment insisted, "detestable and abominable treasons." On 27 May 1541, the 67-year-old was killed at the Tower of London by, 'a wretched and blundering youth' who 'hacked her head and shoulders to pieces in the most pitiful manner."

Future manoeuvrings by those of Yorkist blood or sympathy were not destined to rise above the level of farce. By Mary Tudor's reign, it was left to the benighted Thomas Stafford to carry forward a lost cause. Two of his grandparents, the aforementioned Margaret Pole and the third Duke of Buckingham had been executed for treason and Stafford kept up the family tradition. His entire enterprise was really rather pitiful, however, with a lowlight being the rather pointless seizure of Scarborough Castle in April 1557. It is hard to know whether Stafford genuinely thought that he had a legitimate claim to the throne or whether he was simply unhinged.

A young Henry VII formed an elaborate network of spies in order to preserve and protect his reign

"There were more than enough grumblings against Henry VIII to keep him on high alert"

If the Yorkist menace was all but extinct, however, the Tudors would never lack for rivals and ill-wishers. The chaotic events surrounding Lady Jane Grey's short tenure on the throne were not soon forgotten and the very existence of Mary, Queen of Scots made it abundantly clear that alternative dynastic trajectories could still excite passions during Elizabeth's reign.

In 1581, Anthony Munday published a timely book with a telling title: *A Watch-Woorde to Englande to Beware of Traytours and Tretcherous Practices*. Treason, Munday wrote, was, "of all other things...most odious in the sight of God" and the first part of his book provided a detailed account of how English monarchs had always dealt with turbulent subjects, the likes of Perkin Warbeck and the Earl of Warwick among them. As always, there was huge propagandist advantage to be derived from blackening reputations, but Munday was aiming for more than a history lesson.

"Perhaps," he chided his readers, "thou wilt say these things are done and past, and they were but a certain few that thus have offended, and being justly scourged for their misdemeanours they are now quite worn out of remembrance." In fact, Munday warned, it would be a colossal mistake to "blindly overthrow thyself in conceit." The threats were different now but, as every Elizabethan knew, they were still real enough and, as always, could stem from the heart of the body commonwealth.

"All these evil imps have been of thine own breeding," Munday barked, and "thou hast fostered such children, as have pierced into thy bowels, shaken all thy sinews, yea, and almost have wrung the very marrow out of thy joints." Such words still resonated in the fractious political world of Tudor England.

Margaret Pole was 'hacked to pieces' after after she refused to lay her head on the executioner's block

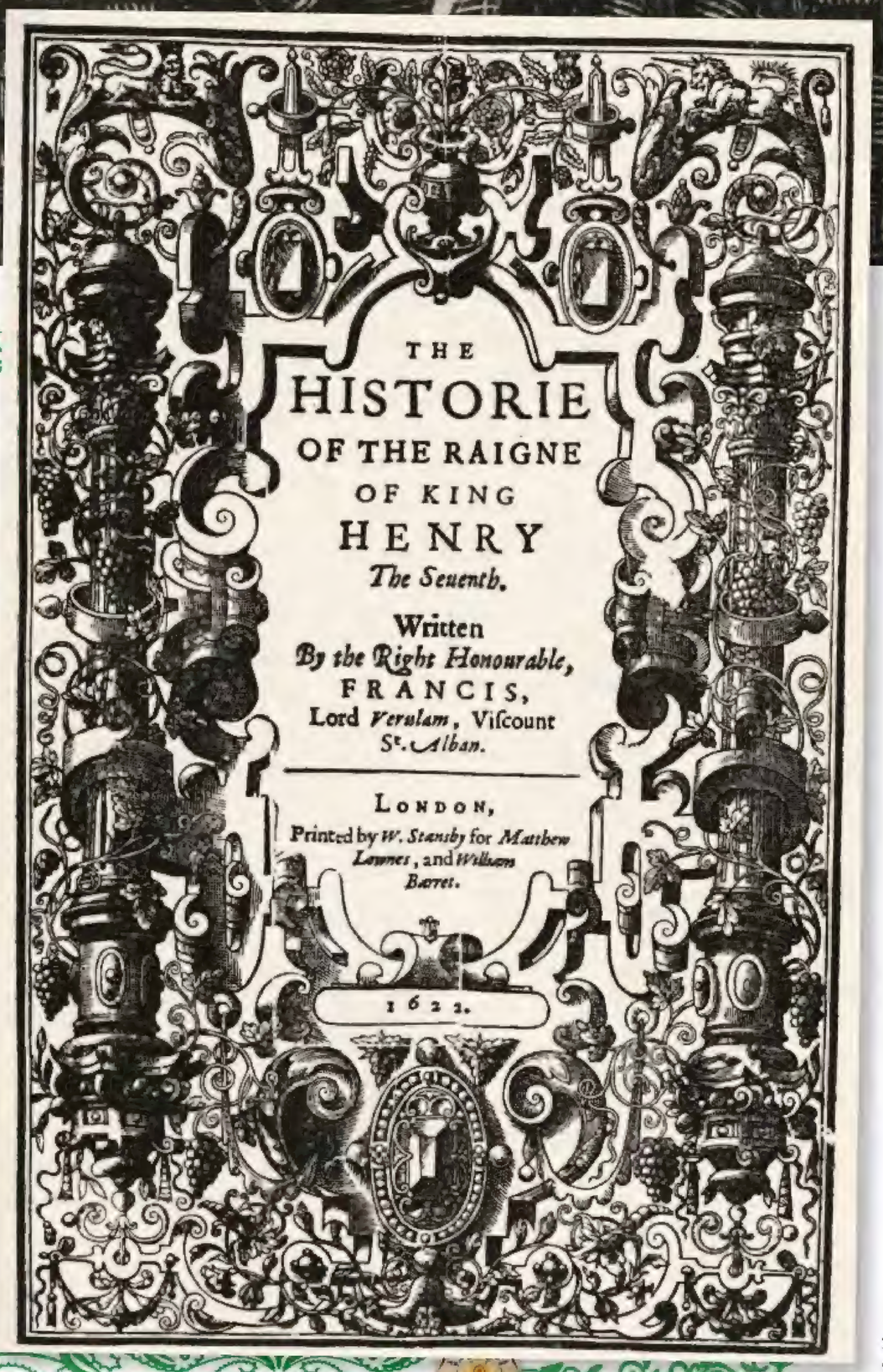
The web of spies

The King went to great lengths to protect his throne

We are very familiar with the intricate and penetrative espionage networks established by Elizabeth I, but they had an early Tudor precedent. Faced with so many challenges to his rule, Henry VII not only went to great lengths to preserve his personal security, but also worked hard to acquire information on his potential rivals. Francis Bacon's account of the reign, published in the 1620s and highly influential for the next two-and-a-half centuries, portrayed a monarch constantly on high alert. "He was careful and liberal," Bacon wrote, "to obtain good intelligence from all parts abroad." Whether recruiting travellers, Englishmen resident abroad, or ambassadors, "his instructions were ever extreme, curious and articulate."

Murkier methods were also at Henry's disposal, notably the "secret spials [spies], which he did employ both at home and abroad by them to discover what practices and conspiracies were against him." Henry, Bacon explained, "had such moles perpetually working and casting" and this was certainly not to "be reprehended. For if spials be lawful against lawful enemies, much more against conspirators and traitors."

Bacon was confident that Henry's strategies paid off: "Surely there was this further good in his employing of these flies and familiars that as the use of them was cause that many conspiracies were revealed, so the fame and suspicion of them kept (no doubt) many conspiracies from being attempted." The difficulty for the historian has always been to pin down precisely who was recruited. During the machinations of Edmund de la Pole in the 16th century, a number of agents infiltrated Edmund's ranks on the continent but with some figures, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions about where their loyalty lay. Was Sir Robert Curzon a true supporter of Edmund who genuinely fled to Flanders when all the plots came to nought? Or had he been loyal to Henry all along, a "brave yet thoughtful man" as Polydore Vergil described him?



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CROWNED TUDOR ROSE

Artist: Jodocus Hondius

A print of the Tudor rose, crowned, with inset portraits of Henry VII in the top left and Elizabeth of York in the top right, the first monarchs of the Tudor dynasty. Right at the centre of the rose sits the English coat of arms. Created during the later reign of Elizabeth I, each petal of the rose is filled with the heraldry of the closest advisors and highest-ranking courtiers of every monarch of the Tudor dynasty.

1589

CROWNED TUDOR ROSE

WAR OF WORDS

With Shakespeare's help, the Tudors manipulated and twisted history to paint themselves the heroes and the Plantagenets the villains

Written by Frances White

Shakespeare, for all his innovation and creativity, was very aware of the political climate of his time. He knew who he had to please and who to vilify, and although entertainment was always his primary concern, he was a smart man who knew not to bite the hand that fed him. That hand, for most of his life, was Elizabeth I. The queen was a huge fan of the theatre and one of Shakespeare's most ardent patrons. The playwright himself was not always subtle in his praise of the Virgin Queen, with an entire passage of exquisite poetry dedicated to her in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, pleasing his primary audience was also on Shakespeare's mind in less obvious ways, notably in his depiction of the Wars of the Roses.

Elizabeth herself was, of course, a Tudor, a daughter of Henry VIII and granddaughter of Henry VII, whose forces defeated Richard III's at the Battle of Bosworth Field. The Wars of the Roses were not recent, but the effects were still felt by England and the court. With the defeat of the Spanish Armada and England rapidly rising in prominence on the world stage, a new English identity was growing, and the monarchs were very keen for this to include them. With Elizabeth aging fast and without and heir, it was essential that the country not devolve into the brutal civil wars that had torn it apart before. For both of these aims, Shakespeare's history plays would play a crucial role.

For a working-class playwright who emerged from obscurity, this was a heavy burden. Shakespeare had to write his histories in a way that would portray the righteousness of the monarch, the ills of the past and what being English really meant. In achieving these aims Shakespeare had to twist the truth, exaggerate characters and, occasionally, forgo true history entirely. Although he was penning these plays some 400 years ago, only now are some of these depictions, so rooted in British identity, beginning to be challenged.

The first of Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses plays is *Henry VI, Part 1*. It depicts the political plots that led to the outbreak of war. The major Plantagenet character is Richard Plantagenet, the 3rd Duke of York. The Wars of the Roses are depicted as a quarrel that gets out of hand and takes over the whole court. This paints York as a somewhat petty man, selfish and consumed by his own quest for revenge. In a play that is very concerned

A key theme of *Henry VI, Part 3* are the horrors a man can be driven to on a quest for revenge

Despite his damning account of Richard, More was only seven when Richard was killed

Shakespeare's sources

Shakespeare was not the only person to twist history to suit his aims

It is easy to point the finger at Shakespeare, as the most well-known and recognised playwright of the period, if not of all time, but actually Shakespeare was just a product of his generation. His plays simply dramatised opinions of people and beliefs of historical truth that had been written by others. From the 1580's onwards chronicle plays of English royal history had become steadily more and more popular. Many believe this is due to the new availability of historical works that provided new information and were ripe with inspiration for ambitious new playwrights. The issue here was that many of these texts were historically incorrect and marred by bias themselves.

Notable accounts were Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York*, which was written with a heavy Protestant bias, and Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, which Shakespeare was known to use extensively, as well as works by John Foxe, another ardent Protestant, and Thomas More, whose defamatory work was perhaps the most important contributor to the monstrous character of Richard that became common belief.

Considering the sources that Shakespeare had at his disposal, it is no wonder that he inherited heavy historical bias. Blame should not be laid purely at the Bard's feet but also at the chroniclers of history and the regime that encouraged slander and the manipulation of facts.

with patriotism, York's obsession with the feud endangers the good of the country when he refuses to send aid to a countryman in need, which leads to the death of one of the heroes. York is shown as unrepentant, refusing to accept any responsibility for the mistake. He goes on to capture Joan de Pucelle (Joan of Arc), mocking the girl brutally before burning her alive.

The York of Shakespeare's play is portrayed as pitiless, easily angered and disastrously selfish. Ruled by his own ambition rather than considering the good of the country, he flies into a rage when he hears of the peace declared between England and France. In an era when English patriotism was such an important part of national identity, York, who places his own desires above those of the country, displays an almost unforgivable ruthlessness. Although it is not the raving, obvious evil of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, it certainly paints the Plantagenets and their cause as one that went against the good of England.

However, the play fails to mention how often Henry VI relied on York, and how, time and time again, although often snubbed by the king, he would return to his country's service. In reality, Henry himself contributed to the quarrel between York and Somerset by providing Somerset with

8,000 men at a time when York was struggling with his own shortages. Of course, it was also not York who killed Joan of Arc, and many of the brutal actions he engages in during the play have little historical support if any.

By *Henry VI, Part 2*, every action York makes is dominated by his obsession with obtaining the throne of England. He makes allies in court and gathers support in Ireland. He is depicted as hiring Jack Cade, an Irish rebel, to lead a rebellion in London. This rebellion did really happen, and it resulted in mass looting and a bloody battle on London Bridge with the citizens of London. By placing the blame for this rebellion at York's feet, Shakespeare instantly vilifies him. But in reality, there has been no evidence found that indicates that York was involved in funding or inciting the uprising at all. York's deception is further highlighted when Shakespeare has him entering England claiming to want to protect the king, when in reality he wishes to ascertain his claim to the throne.

Perhaps the most inaccurate depiction in the play, which further slanders the Plantagenets and their cause, is actually that of Henry VI. The king is portrayed as almost saint-like in his goodliness. Even his language echoes biblical verse when he utters lines such as "O graceless men, they know not what they do," echoing the line spoken by Jesus: "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." His actions too differ from history when, after the revolt, he is portrayed as pardoning all who surrender, allowing them to go home unharmed. In reality he actually had several of the leaders executed. Shakespeare's Henry is a gentle, peace-loving king who just wants to do what is right, when in reality Henry was far from perfect; he was regarded as weak and inefficient, and he was also known for bouts of madness. It was his own ineffective rule that prompted the rebellions that plagued his reign, and York was far from the only person who was unsatisfied with his rule. This is why York gained so much support in the first place. By Shakespeare transforming Henry into a saint-like figure he in turn demonises York and portrays the Plantagenet cause as a selfish quest for power that tore a happy, God-loving England asunder. As is always the case with history, things were not so black and white.

We begin to see more of the well-known Plantagenet figures appear in *Henry VI, Part 3*, with not only York but also his sons Edward, Richard and George featuring. It follows York's death and Edward's victory, which made him king in his father's place. The play focuses on the horrors of war and the atrocities that tore the country apart. Although both sides are shown committing horrendous acts (as it was in history), the depravity of the Plantagenet cause is emphasised almost immediately. York enters the play carrying the head of the Duke of Somerset, demonstrating the degradation of the chivalric customs that England would have held dear. Meanwhile, yet again, Henry VI is portrayed more sympathetically, lamenting the loss of life and the horrors of war.

This play also sets up what would become one of the most iconic and controversial figures of Shakespeare's creation – Richard III. Almost immediately after he is proclaimed Duke of Gloucester, he secretly reveals his ambition to take the throne from his brother. He also goes to the Tower of London and kills Henry. This has no historical basis at all. Henry was most likely killed on the orders of Edward, and his death had nothing to do with Richard.

Another death laid at Richard's feet is Prince Edward's, who is stabbed to death by all three Plantagenet brothers after they fly into a mad rage when he will not kneel to them. This is a popular account of the prince's death, but all sources

Throughout the plays Henry VI laments the savagery that occurs when a nation turns upon itself

***Henry VI, Part 2* depicts the marriage of the benevolent Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou**

that state this were written during the Tudor era and are almost certainly fiction designed to elicit sympathy for the prince and hatred for the brothers. The true events of the prince's death are unknown, and all contemporary sources simply state he was killed in battle.

The depiction of Richard in *Henry VI, Part 3* is only a precursor to what comes in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. It is a portrayal that has divided audiences, outraged historians and affected common opinion of the real Richard for hundreds of years. Only now, after the discovery of Richard's body brought the king to the forefront of British consciousness, is the character in *Richard III* truly being questioned and the issue of who was the real Richard being addressed.

The most obvious aspect of Richard in the play is his physical appearance. He is an ugly hunchback, describing himself as "deformed, unfinish'd", so hideous he is unable to enjoy the pleasures of life. He is also shown to have a withered arm and a limp. His anger over his appearance is actually what drives most of his actions, saying that as he cannot be a hero he will be a villain instead.

Shakespeare was not the one to create the hunchback persona; it was a key aspect of Tudor propaganda, with paintings of Richard doctored to display physical impairments. Shakespeare ran with this portrayal, and his depiction of Richard as a hunchback was so effective that it became common opinion for hundreds of years. However, in reality the only deformity Richard suffered was scoliosis of the spine, which manifested in his right shoulder being slightly higher than the left. It is believed this was so minor that it would not be visible when he was wearing armour, and it is likely his enemies only discovered it after his death. This is backed up by the fact that none of his contemporary critics in his lifetime criticised

Talbot in real history was regarded as a national hero, with even the French raising a monument to him

this deformity, which would have been a very easy shot for them to take.

If Richard did have such extreme deformities like a hunchback or limp, it would have been difficult for him to even wear armour or fight in battle, and we know that Richard fought in many battles. Shakespeare then was simply conforming, feeding into the Tudor propaganda that surrounded Richard and a belief that evil manifests not only within but also in a person's outer appearance.

The Richard of the play is a serial plotter and murderer. He wins over Anne Neville, widow of Prince Edward, and tells the audience he will discard her once she has served her purpose. In reality, Richard did not kill his first wife (she most likely died of tuberculosis), and Richard was recorded as having wept openly at her funeral. The portrayal of Richard as a serial womaniser continues in the play as he schemes to marry his own niece, Elizabeth of York. This was a rumour the king was forced to deny in his own lifetime. After Anne Neville's death Richard actually sent his niece away and negotiated for her marriage with the Portuguese prince Manuel, Duke of Meja. As for himself, he had his sights set on the sister of the king of Portugal, Joan. It is a fabrication that he had any desire to marry his niece.

Perhaps most erroneous in the play are the huge number of murders attributed to Richard that in reality had nothing to do with him. One of the first is that of George, Duke of Clarence, his brother. In the play Richard orders two murderers to kill Clarence while he is in the Tower of London. The heinous nature of the act is emphasised by the fact that one of the murderers is struck by a bout of conscience and refuses to carry it out. The other killer carries out Richard's instructions, stabbing and drowning Clarence. News of the murder essentially kills Edward IV, who is already ill. This is a huge diversion from known history. It was actually Edward IV who was responsible for George's death, and he was no innocent himself having being found guilty of treason. Edward died five years after Clarence's

"Perhaps most erroneous in the play are the number of murders attributed to Richard that had nothing to do with him"

A game of adaptations

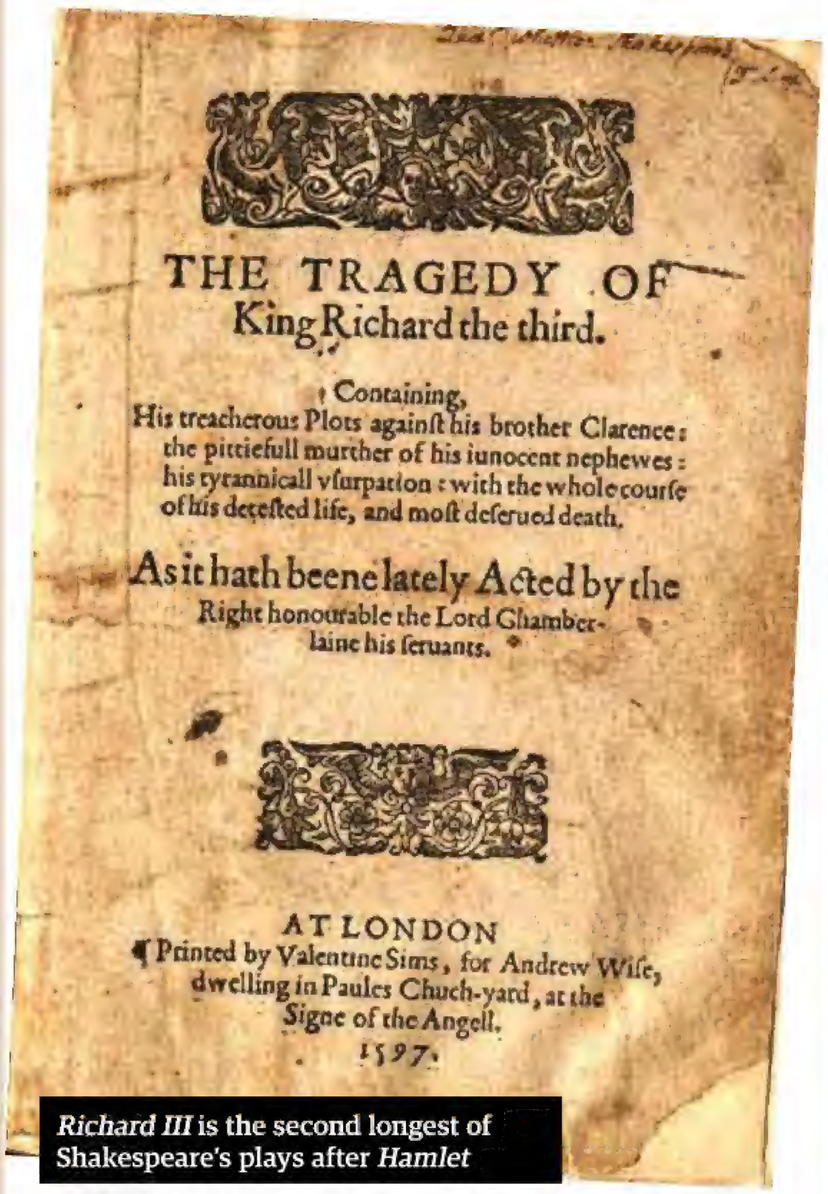
Richard is known now not only as a king, but a prominent villainous role for an actor to play

As one of Shakespeare's most famous plays (and almost certainly his most well-known history play) *Richard III* has been performed widely across stage and screen. It has also received the usual treatment of being modernised and adapted into a host of different eras and settings.

In the 1939 film, Richard is a self-obsessed murderer with a club-footed executioner, Mord. Every time the villain commits a murder he removes a figure from a doll house. Another Richard III horror film, featuring Vincent Price, was produced in 1962 and combined elements from *Macbeth* to make Richard into the ultimate Shakespearean villain. In 1995, Ian McKellen starred as Richard in a film set in the 1930s. In this adaptation Richard is intent on ruling as a fascist dictator, and there are many similarities to Nazi Germany throughout the film. By associating Richard with the Third Reich, regarded by many as the ultimate evil of the 20th century, the horrors of the Wars of the Roses are brought uncomfortably close for a modern audience.

All these depictions, despite being entertaining, further fictionalised the character of Richard III. Each adaptation further separates Shakespeare's character from the real man who lived and breathed, almost making it superfluous to begin to compare the two. Shakespeare's Richard has, over time, become less a representation of the English king and more a symbolic figure, a caricature of the evil that can grow in ambitious men, no matter the time or place.

Despite being the villain, Richard is also treated as comic relief in the play


THE TRAGEDY OF
King Richard the third.

¶ Containing,
His treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull murther of his iunocent nephewes: his tyrannicall vsurpation: with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserued death.

As it hath beene lately Acted by the Right honourable the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants.

AT LONDON
¶ Printed by Valentine Sims, for Andrew Wise, dwelling in Paules Church-yard, at the Signe of the Angell.
1597.

Richard III is the second longest of Shakespeare's plays after *Hamlet*

execution, and Richard was nowhere near him when this happened, living in the north of England at the time.

All of Richard's cruel actions in the play are motivated by his uncontrollable ambition, his quest to claim the throne. It is difficult, nigh on impossible, to determine if the real Richard shared this ambition. There are valid arguments in both camps, but Shakespeare's depiction of unbridled ambition certainly goes against some of the facts.

Richard didn't kill his brother, the king, and when Edward requested he rule as Lord Protector of the Realm it was not a political move Richard asked of him. In fact, Richard had been living happily in the north for many years, so the appointment uprooted his entire life. In the play, in order to obtain the throne, Richard commits multiple murders, including those of Lord Rivers, Hastings, Grey and Sir Thomas Vaughan. But this differs with reality: Richard was given the throne due to an act of parliament, and although blood was spilt, it was very little for the times.

Perhaps Shakespeare's most contested claim is that Richard arranged for the murder of the Princes in the Tower. In the play the two princes outsmart Richard and, seeing them as a threat, he has them killed. In reality, we do not know who killed the princes. There is no great evidence that could lead to the conviction of any suspect today, and it is likely a mystery that will remain unsolved. Putting the child murders at Richard's feet, however, ensured he was vilified.

On the other side of this coin is Richmond (the future Henry VII). He is the good to Richard's evil - the dastardlier Richard becomes, the more heroic Richmond grows. Considering Shakespeare's patron was Henry VII's granddaughter, one can understand why Richmond is painted as the hero. But Richard suffers further to make this so.

Prior to the Battle of Bosworth, Richard is visited by the ghosts of his victims, who wish death upon him and victory upon Richmond. Richmond becomes the saviour of the wronged and England's hero against the evil of Richard. Shakespeare emphasised what a good king Richmond would make when compared to Richard as, in actual fact, his claim to the throne was far weaker, coming from the female line and through illegitimacy. This is something the Tudors were very aware of. If they could not rely on their hereditary right to rule, then it was vital to swell how morally superior they were to Richard.

All these plays were written with the same focus in mind - that the Plantagenets needed to be bad so the Tudors could be good. Most importantly, Richard needed to be the worst of all. Although it is very easy to understand why Shakespeare did this (a play of the heroic nature of Richard III would likely not have received royal approval), it was also for many years disastrous in regards to the true history of the Wars of the Roses. The truth was twisted to fit a Tudor propaganda quest that was so powerful it virtually erased the true nature of the men who ruled before. Shakespeare was first a dramatist; his plays were written to entertain, and it is important to remember that. As iconic as the character of the hunchback Richard plotting his way to the top is, it is just that - a character who is more a comment on the Tudor dynasty than Richard himself.

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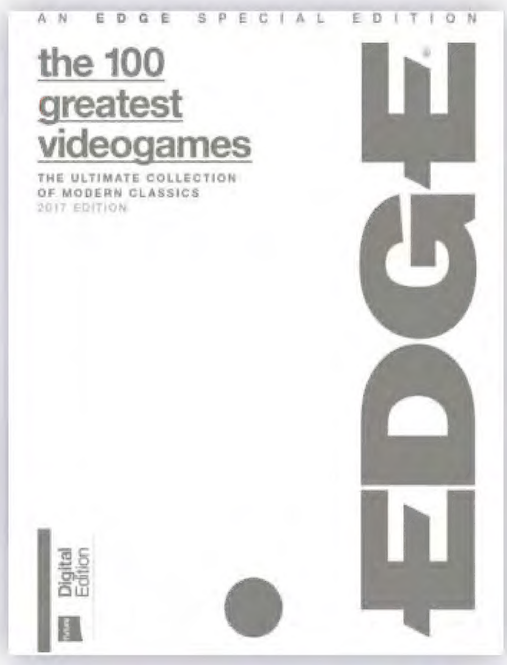

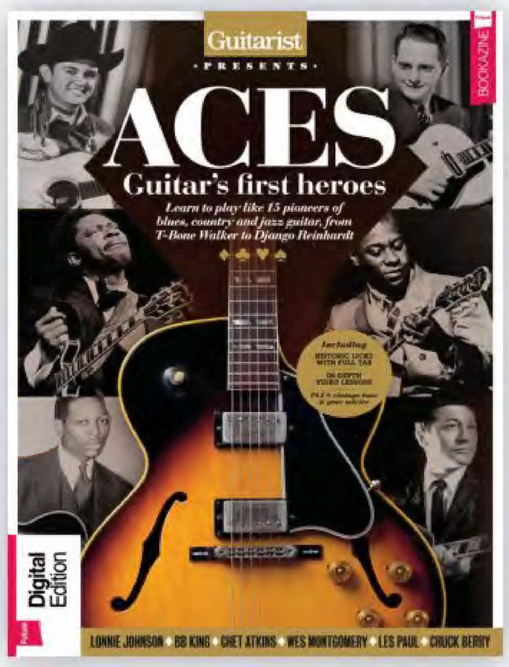

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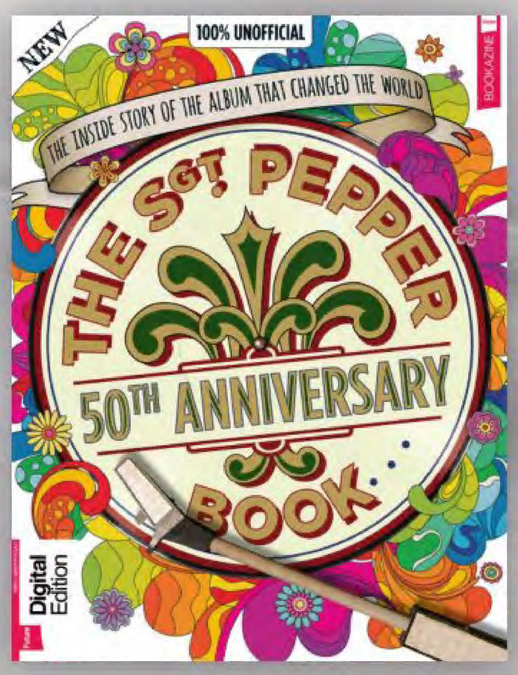

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